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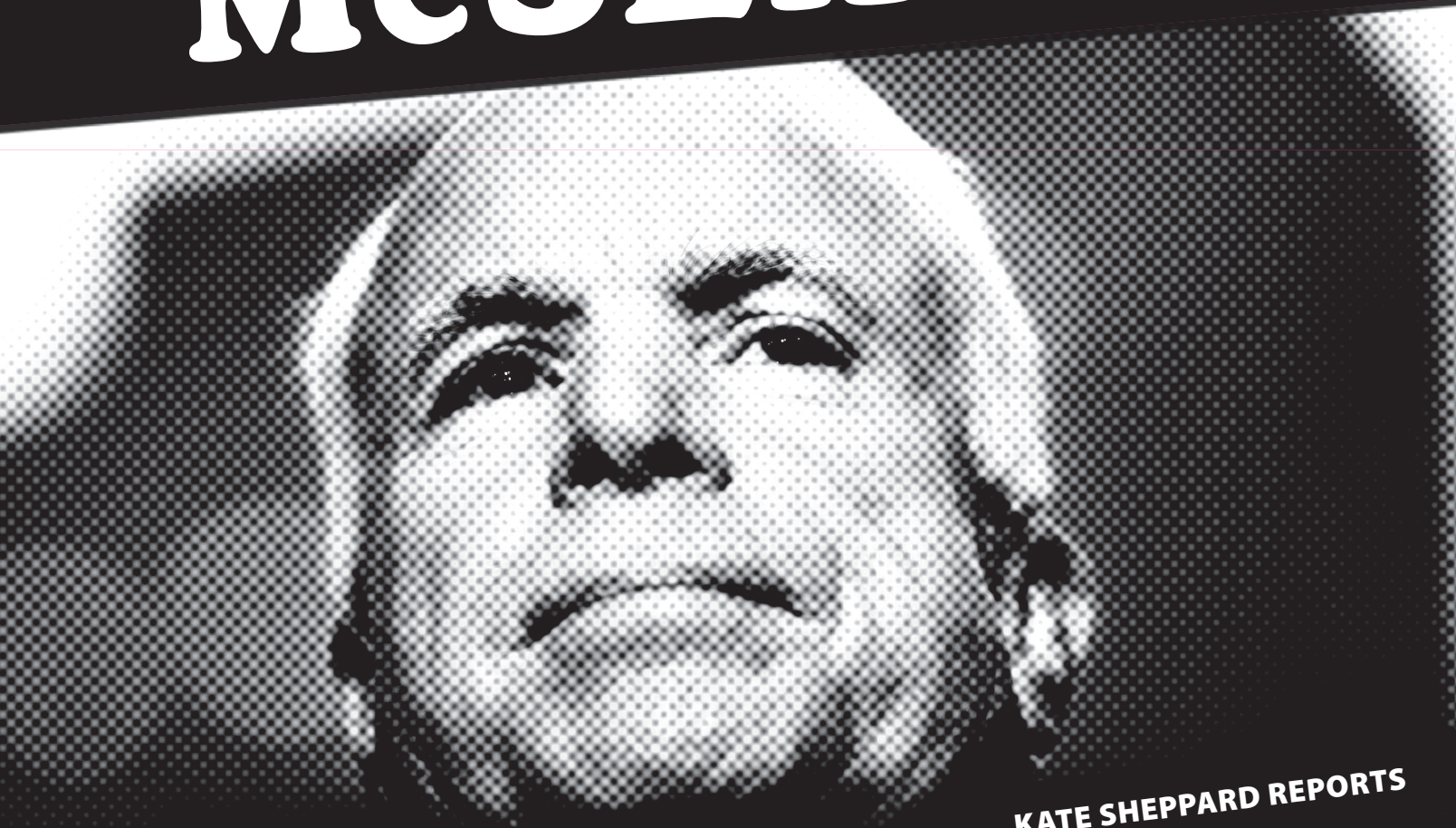
AUGUST 2008

# IN THESE TIMES

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# McSEXIST



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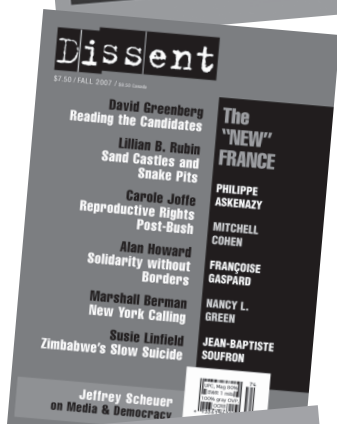
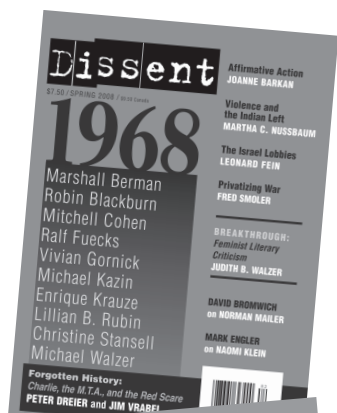
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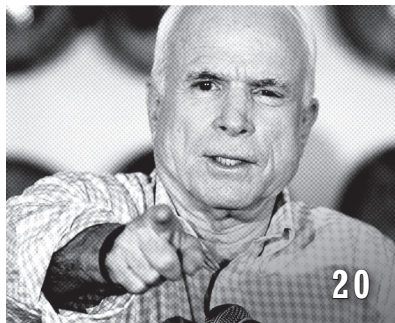
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## Holding Barack Accountable

**I**N RECENT WEEKS, Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) has treated his supporters to a series of unsettling revelations about his views.

Obama now supports extending the death penalty to a new category of crimes; he sided with a decision striking down Washington, D.C.'s 32-year ban on handguns; he plans to vote for a bill that sanctions domestic spying; he gave a hawkish speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and promised the audience an "undivided Jerusalem."

Obama recently hired neoliberal economist Jason Furman, a champion of trade deals like NAFTA that put corporate interests over workers rights—even though Obama had, until now, opposed NAFTA.

Further, Obama has embraced the mantra of personal responsibility. On Father's Day, he excoriated absentee dads for failing to "realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child—it's the courage to raise one." He has announced his desire to continue Bush's faith-based initiative program and, in a strange position for a liberal Democrat, says he supports posting the Ten Commandments in public areas "in some cases."

Though many Democratic voters have made peace with their candidate's re-positioning—reflecting their desire to turn the page from eight years of the Bush presidency—we must demand accountability.

Remember, Bill Clinton, too, ran as a centrist in 1992. Democratic voters gave him a pass, assuming this was customary general election strategy. But Clinton stayed centrist, championing NAFTA, "welfare reform," federalization of crime and expanding the death penalty. Clinton got away with it. In 2008, progressives must not let Obama do the same.

Obama's shift to the right undercuts his emphasis on "change" and threatens to disillusion newly energized voters.

What's more, it appeals to the most reactionary elements—the National Rifle Association (NRA), pro-death penalty forces, corporate "free trade" and right-wing Israeli lobbies—at the expense of the Democratic Party's most loyal and growing constituencies.

Obama shouldn't pursue this strategy. With an expanded electorate, his strategists need to reconsider their pursuit of moderates. Obama's new positions conflict with where "the middle" in American politics is today.

Majorities support change. Death penalty abolition has gained momentum, as New Jersey became the first state in more than 40 years to ban executions. Death sentences have declined to a 30-year low, while executions are at 10-year low. Sixty-three percent say NAFTA has hurt the American economy. More than 60 percent want the \$3.3 billion in annual U.S. aid to Israel tied to progress for Palestine. Contrary to the NRA's media echo chamber, three-fourths of gun owners support mandatory handgun registration, as does 85 percent of the public.

By adopting conservative positions, Obama is ignoring the lessons of his own ascendancy, driven by progressive-leaning youth. These young people have embraced issues such as gay rights, racial and ethnic equality, and stopping the death penalty.

The risks are high. If Obama abandons his commitment to a new brand of politics, he will alienate these newly energized supporters. Paradoxically, the self-proclaimed agent of change seems oblivious to the fact that the country is in a moment of unprecedented opportunity for progressive transformation.

Obama should understand that committing to conservatives now will complicate his ability to make this transformation later. The dispiriting lesson of Bill Clinton must not get lost on Obama.

—James Thindwa

## IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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# mixed reaction

## JUST THE FACTS



**489,000** Number of claims filed against the federal government over failed levees and floodwalls.

**\$3.1** Proposed payout for said claims, in trillions.

**143,000** Number of formaldehyde-ridden FEMA trailers sent to Gulf Coast in 2006.

**22,000** Number of formaldehyde-ridden FEMA trailers still in use in Gulf Coast region.

“ I don't think we should give up our values to find common ground. Then it's not common ground; It's their ground and we're just standing on it. ”

— THE CHARACTER JOHN JR., IN “NOW OR LATER,” A NEW PLAY BY CHRISTOPHER SHINN. JOHN JR. IS SPEAKING TO HIS FATHER, A DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT, ABOUT PANDERING TO CENTRIST VOTERS.

## LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



## QUID PRO QUO

### THE QUID:

Can golf, “the game of kings,” stop kids from joining the Latin Kings? The Department of Justice (DOJ) apparently believes so. According to ABC News, the DOJ gave a \$500,000 federal grant to the World Golf Foundation's First Tee program, which aims to teach inner-city kids, in the words of its director, that “golf is a game where values such as honesty, integrity and sportsmanship are essential.”

The DOJ awarded the grant despite the fact that staffers had ranked the program as the 47th most-deserving recipient out of 104 applicants.

### THE QUO:

It didn't hurt that First Tee's honorary chairman is George H.W. Bush.

Similar ties to a Republican power broker might also explain why Best Friends, a D.C.-based program that promotes abstinence, received \$1.1



million from the DOJ, despite ranking 53rd out of 104 applicants. Best Friends' president and founder is Elayne Bennett, wife of moralizing slot addict, Bill.

# letters



## Stat geeks needed

In her column ("The Great Election Robbery of 2008?" July), Laura S. Washington is daunted by the "messy agglomeration of blurry statistics, indecipherable bar graphs and arcane acronyms" in David L. Griscom's essay "How to Stuff the Electronic Ballot Box."

But it is just such statistical analyses that are the best indications of fraud in counting ballots. Historical voting patterns, exit polls and similar data must be examined statistically to pull out the anomalies that ring the alarm bell.

If we retreat to helpless innumeracy, we leave the field open to the cheaters.

*Mike McDonnell  
Menominee, Mich.*

Laura S. Washington writes: "Still, once you skim through the tech stuff, there's still plenty of critical evidence left that shows we have been lulled into a dangerous complacency about the integrity of our election system."

This statement represents a dangerous avoidance of technical issues. When we

talk about issues like voting fraud, intelligent design (a fraud), and Internet neutrality, technical information is the strongest evidence for or against a given side.

More and more people on the wrong side of the technical evidence have learned to manufacture technical-sounding information in an effort to convince non-technically educated people that what they are saying is sound. It's simply another form of lying.

**If you cannot bring yourself to critically evaluate technical information, you will be forced to rely on 'experts' rather than your own mind.**

If you cannot bring yourself to critically evaluate technical information, you will be forced to rely on "experts" rather than your own mind, and such experts will be able to manufacture controversy where none exists by simply wooing journalists with scientific-sounding language.

Technical information is either true or false, and a good journalist needs to be able to spot shoddy information using good scientific skills and critical evaluation of statistics.

*Zachariah Norman  
Via E-mail*

## Gibler does homework

I want you to know how much I appreciated John Gibler's "Death Squads in Oaxaca" (July). It is the best piece I have seen on this subject since the two journalists were

murdered. Gibler has done his homework and it shows.

*Barbara Chase  
Via E-mail*

## Errol Morris: artist

In his review of Errol Morris' latest film ("Errol Morris' Myopia," June), Michael Atkinson is completely blind to the fact that most of his criticisms of Morris apply (much more aptly) to his own writing. To wit, the critic refers to the "film's over-produced

on gimmickry as Atkinson's review. His writing is little else. What on earth is "foofaraw"? And how does one manufacture "an impressionistic head-trip, a blitzkrieg of imagistic doodles"?

So, maybe the writing is a little flamboyant. As long as he makes good points, it's forgivable; but he doesn't. In fact, he doesn't seem to understand anything Morris has ever done. Atkinson criticizes Morris for being reluctant to pronounce some "overt ethical inquiry."

What Atkinson really wants Morris to do is produce an unambiguous documentary. Morris has never done that. Morris is an artist, so why should he produce these types of documentaries? Since when is homogeneity a virtue?

*G.S. Croce  
Via E-mail*

## INTHESETIMES.COM

Columnist Ken Brociner touched off one of the most popular discussions on our website on June 24. He wrote: "The ... progressive media is now rife with writers who seem to demonize practically anyone who dares to see things differently than they do. No one fits this description better than David Sirota. In the world according to Sirota, there is no such thing as having an honest difference of opinion."

On July 1, in "Earth to Ken Brociner," Martha Biondi and James Thindwa responded: "Hello? What political universe does he live in? That is a charge more applicable to the pundits on the Right. Calling out [people who reject equality] is not 'demonizing' them. It is calling a spade a spade."





# contributors

## Dear Reader,

Liz Dunn recently wrote me to say: "It is with great sadness that I must inform you of my mother's passing. Elsie Chivington thought highly of your publication. She gave past issues to friends, and shared articles she especially liked with me. In the last few months, she kept the photo you sent her of the staff next to her bed. Thank you for being her friend, and for producing such a fine publication." Chivington, a member of the *In These Times* Publishing Consortium, was one of this magazine's most unflagging supporters. We wish her family the best.

And we hope that you, too, will become a member of the *In These Times* community.

In the next couple of weeks, we will be sending out our second-quarter appeal. Please respond according to your ability. Or, fill out the form inserted in the issue you hold in your hands. Thank you.

In solidarity.



Joel Bleifuss  
Editor & Publisher

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For more information call Joel Bleifuss at 773-772-0100 x232 or e-mail Joel at: [joel@inthesetimes.com](mailto:joel@inthesetimes.com).



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**TAM TURSE** is a freelance photojournalist working in New York City and the official photographer at TomDispatch.com. Her work can be seen at [www.TamTurse.com](http://www.TamTurse.com).

**PETER MARCUSE** is professor emeritus of Urban Planning at Columbia University and was involved in the demonstrations at the University of California-Berkeley in 1968. His father, Herbert Marcuse, was a founding sponsor of *In These Times* and was one of the philosophers who provided a theoretical basis for the 1968 protest movements and the New Left.

**LUIS CARLOS MONTALVÁN**, a former captain in the U.S. Army, is the highest-ranking member of Iraq Veterans Against the War. He has published in the *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Washington Post*.



The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.

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The U.S. Senate recently passed the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, which Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) attempted to derail with an amendment that proposes to end abortions in Indian Country.

## Poison Pill Slipped Into Indian Health Bill

Pro-life amendment used to derail legislation

BY MICHELLE CHEN

**W**HEN IT COMES to their health, American Indian women face extraordinary barriers—from high disease risks to increased incidents of sexual violence. They now face another obstacle, rooted in the political battleground of abortion.

The Senate's recent passage of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act was a breakthrough for advocacy groups that have long pushed for the bill's provisions—new programs, improved facilities and funding for the Indian Health Services (IHS) system, which serves about 1.9 million people nationwide.

But the victory is dampened by a poison pill provision slipped in by Sen. Da-

vid Vitter (R-La.) that explicitly restricts abortions under IHS programs. The amendment was approved along with the bill in February. As *In These Times* went to press, it was unclear whether the House would vote on companion legislation carrying a similar amendment.

Speaking at a Right to Life rally in January, Vitter boasted that his amendment put "clear, strong, pro-life language in that Indian healthcare bill."

In fact, the amendment mostly replicates an older, more general ban on abortion funding under federal health programs, known as the Hyde Amendment. IHS is already subject to those restrictions, which allow federal financing for abortion only in cases of rape, incest or endangerment of

the pregnant woman's life.

Still, Vitter's initiative entrenches Hyde's strictures more firmly by directly changing IHS's long-term governing statute. Enacted in the late 1970s, Hyde is subject to annual revision when renewed through the appropriations process. It mainly applies to Medicaid, but anti-abortion groups have lobbied to expand its reach in other areas, such as the military and federal prison health systems.

Opponents say Vitter has tethered crucial health programs to an anti-abortion agenda and brazenly targeted Native women's reproductive rights.

"It's a race-based amendment, because it's trying to reduce our right to access abortion more than any other race of women in this country," says Charon Asetoyer of the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center (NAWHERC), a research and advocacy organization.

Critics point to slight differences in the wording of the Vitter amendment that could tighten existing restrictions—for instance, the limitation of the incest exception to women under 18.

Although some states offer separate funding for abortions deemed medically necessary for overall health, Hyde has generally succeeded in raising barriers to abortion for poor women. By making abortion prohibitively costly, the funding restrictions have historically led many women to have abortions later, at greater medical risk, or not at all, according to a study by the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive-health policy group.

The consequences of abortion funding restrictions are uniquely dire in Native communities, where women are disproportionately poor, more likely to be sexually assaulted, and acutely limited in their options for dealing with unplanned pregnancy.

"Native women are so much more vulnerable on so many levels," says Sarah Deer, a Minnesota-based victim advocacy legal specialist with the Tribal Law & Policy Institute, "from health problems, to being victims of violence, to housing.



We're the ones suffering the most on a lot of different issues."

According to research by NAWHERC, IHS facilities performed only a handful of abortions over a two-decade period. But the Center has also found that IHS staff routinely failed to properly enforce the Hyde Amendment's protections for assault survivors. Meanwhile, state health records indicate that Native women in North and South Dakota and Alaska are over-represented among abortion cases compared to their overall state populations, suggesting that many are resorting to private abortion providers.

This isn't the first time the abortion issue has ensnared Indian Country. In South Dakota, which has an especially high Native population, Asetoyer and other activists campaigned successfully in 2006 against a proposal for a statewide ban on abortions. A similar initiative is up for a referendum vote this November.

But since the Vitter amendment would not dramatically change current abortion policies at IHS, the bigger concern is that it will sink the Native health bill

altogether, killing prospects for a much needed funding infusion. That would still be a victory for Vitter, who voted against the bill even with his amendment.

To Kitty Marx, legislative director of the National Indian Health Board, an advocacy group representing Native communities, the health of nearly 2 million American Indians and Alaskan Natives is being subsumed in a political proxy battle.

"[This] is an Indian healthcare bill—written by Indians for Indians," she says. "If Congress wants to have a national debate on abortion, then have it on a national bill."

Asetoyer says Vitter's initiative creates a cruel dilemma for activists focused on the intersection between reproductive rights and Native health issues. She continues to support the bill despite the amendment: "We just may have to eat this one, because we cannot use this to stop the bill from going through. Otherwise, we'd end up with no healthcare at all." ■

**MICHELLE CHEN'S** work has appeared in *Extra!*, *Legal Affairs*, *City Limits* and *Alternet*, along with her self-published zine, *cain*.

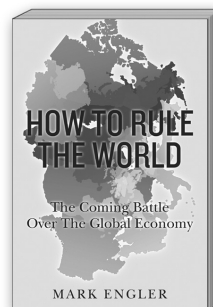
## The Dark Side of the Toyota Prius

**T**HE NATIONAL LABOR Committee (NLC), a New York-based human rights group, has been investigating working conditions at Toyota Motor Corp., and the labor used to produce its best-selling Prius hybrid cars.

In its 65-page report released in June, NLC includes first-hand testimony of factory conditions in "Toyota City," outside of Nagoya, Japan—less than 200 miles southwest of Tokyo—where the largest auto company in the world employs some 70,000 people.

The report alleges that Toyota exploits guest workers, mostly shipped in from China and Vietnam. According to the NLC, these workers are "stripped of their passports and often forced to work—including at subcontract plants supplying Toyota—16 hours a day, seven days a week, while being paid less than half the legal minimum wage." Workers are forced to live in company dormitories and deported

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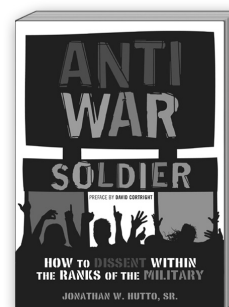


### How to Rule the World

The Coming Battle Over the Global Economy

BY MARK ENGLER

"Impressively researched and sharply argued, *How to Rule the World* is an essential handbook not for the few who do rule the world but for the many who should." —Greg Grandin, author of *Empire's Workshop*



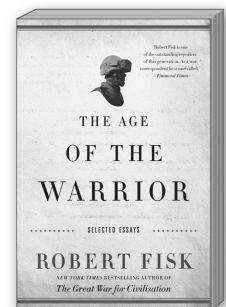
### Anti War Soldier

How to Dissent Within the Ranks of the Military

BY JONATHAN W. HUTTO, SR.

"When he entered the Navy in 2004, Hutto brought his social values and commitment to human rights with him—as this book testifies. His life as student activist, human rights campaigner, and now citizen-sailor has been a living witness to the enduring legacy of Dr. King's struggle for justice and peace."

—From the Preface by David Cortright



AVAILABLE IN AUGUST

### The Age of the Warrior

Selected Essays

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New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Great War for Civilisation*

"Robert Fisk is one of the outstanding reporters of this generation. As a war correspondent he is unrivalled."

—Financial Times

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## RENEGADE GREEN THUMBS, UNITE!

When Richard Reynolds decided to secretly cultivate the neglected flowerbeds outside his drab London apartment block, he unknowingly tapped into a long tradition of clandestine horticulture.

"My goals were very modest—to simply improve the physical environment of the immediate vicinity aesthetically and to enjoy the activity of gardening," he says.

But after blogging about his experience, Reynolds realized he "was part of something bigger." The reward, he says, "went well beyond my original aims."

Reynolds became a guerrilla gardener. Guerrilla gardeners cultivate land they do not own—primarily untended public spaces, such as abandoned lots and thicketed roadsides. They plant flowers, vegetables or anything they can get their hands on.

Their goal is not only to beautify the world, Reynolds says, but also to reclaim public space and fight the ravages of industrial society. They often work at night to avoid detection.

Reynolds' website, guerrillagardening.org, is a hub for renegade green thumbs worldwide. It hosts a forum with more than 6,000 members from more than 25 countries.

Reynolds says he hopes that voluntary acts of public beauty will inspire others to get involved: "At best, they think about the land in a new way and become interested in participating. That's when it becomes a positive community gesture."

—Mark Berlin



RICHARD REYNOLDS

for complaining about poor treatment, the report finds.

Low-wage temporary workers make up one-third of Toyota's Prius assembly-line workers, mostly in the auto-parts supply chain. They are signed to contracts for periods as short as four months, and are paid only 60 percent of a full-time employee's wage.

Parts plants run by subcontractors advertise standard, nine-hour, five-day-a-week jobs. But according to the NLC, "the typical shift was 15 to 16.5 hours a day, from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. or 1:00 a.m."

In 2002, Kenichi Uchino, 30, died while working at the "green" Tsutsumi plant that assembles the Prius. During the 13th hour of a routine 14-hour day, Uchino collapsed on the shop floor of the internationally lauded "sustainable" factory, which uses sulfur-oxide-eating paint and boasts 5 percent emissions reductions. A Japanese court ruled that Uchino's death was caused by exhaustion from overwork.

His wife, Hiroko Uchino, described a grueling lifestyle that included an 85-hour workweek prior to his death. The NLC published his time cards, which reveal that he was "putting in 106.5 to 155 hours of overtime ... in the 30 days leading up to his death."

Much of this overtime went unpaid. (Toyota explained Kenichi's extra hours as "voluntary quality control activities," says the report.) But in court, his survivors were able to win pension payments.

The NLC also alleges that Toyota—through its subsidiary Toyota Tsusho—has joint business ventures with Burma's military regime. The charges arise from an agreement between Tsusho, Suzuki and the junta to set up parts and material plants in Burma, and produce vehicles for the military government. These ties remain despite a 2001 declaration from the company that it ended contracts with the Burmese government.

In the wake of the report, the company wrote a letter to stockholders: "Toyota has carefully considered the current environment in Burma, has conveyed to Toyota Tsusho Corporation its concerns about that environment, and has asked Toyota Tsusho to reconsider its business activities in the country." As the largest owner of



TOYOTA MOTOR CORPORATION VIA GETTY IMAGES

**A new report alleges that Toyota, the world's largest auto company, is violating workers' rights at Prius hybrid plants in Japan.**

Tsusho's stock (more than a third), Toyota itself has a role to play in cutting these ties.

The NLC report also connects the company's overseas misdeeds to the American economy. Millions of dollars in car parts shipped by Toyota Tsusho are received by Tsusho America, which distributes them to Toyota assembly plants in the American South. This influx of foreign auto infrastructure uses an overwhelming ratio of non-union labor, fueling the diminution of union density in the auto sector.

What's more, a memo leaked from Toyota's Georgetown, Ky., plant to the *New York Times* in late 2007, exposed "management's plans to cut \$300 million in labor costs across Toyota's North American operations over the next three years." To do this, Toyota plans to introduce tiered wage scales and reduced health benefits for U.S. Toyota workers, which should come as little surprise to an American auto workforce that has suffered similar attacks from Detroit's Big Three manufacturers for the past three decades.

As NLC Director Charles Kernaghan says, if Hollywood celebrities—such as actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Cameron Diaz—can popularize green driving, they can also help end Toyota's sweatshop labor regime and its ties to Burma's dictatorship.

Says Kernaghan: "We hope that these same celebrities will now also challenge Toyota to improve its respect for human and worker rights."

—Paul Abowd



## EPA on Trial

**F**OR MORE THAN six years, Hugh Kaufman has been battling the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), his employer for 36 years, with a whistleblower lawsuit. He has been aided by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a D.C.-based group that represents workers who expose corruption in agencies that oversee environmental quality and public health.

"We get people calling us all the time, but in this administration, more than ever," says Paula Dinerstein, PEER senior counsel.

In June, Kaufman made his case before a Department of Labor administrative law judge, testifying that former EPA head Christine Todd Whitman closed down the agency's National Ombudsman Office in an effort to stop investigations that Kaufman was conducting.

As the chief investigator for the agency's National Ombudsman Office—which investigated public complaints about the EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response—Kaufman had a bird's eye view of how the public health and safety was routinely subordinated to corporate interests.

"The Reagan, Bush I and Clinton EPAs, were all pretty much the same," he says. "The Bush administration took a bad EPA and made it worse."

In February 2001, Kaufman alerted the *Denver Post* to the fact that Whitman had not recused herself from the negotiations involving a radioactive Superfund site in Denver in which she had a conflict of interest. (Superfund sites are contaminated areas that threaten public health and the environment.) Specifically, Kaufman noted that at the same time Whitman was negotiating the settlement with Citigroup, which owned the site, she held between \$100,000 and \$250,000 worth of stock in the company, and her husband, John, was the president of a Citigroup-owned company.

The EPA ultimately ruled that Citigroup would pay \$7 million of the estimated \$35 million cleanup costs, with the public picking up the rest. Such small reimbursements have been typical under the Bush administration's EPA. In a 2007 report, the Center for Public Integrity found that

from 2000 to 2006, reimbursements from companies for site cleanups fell by half compared to the previous six years.

At the June hearing, Kaufman also presented evidence that Whitman, by dismantling the National Ombudsman Office, interrupted his investigations into the agency's endorsement of sewage sludge as fertilizer. In February, a federal district court in Georgia upheld farmers' claims that the sludge containing heavy metals contaminated their farmland, writing:

The EPA's unexplained rejection of Kaufman's [public health] position ... was not based on substantial evidence. ... The administrative record contains evidence that senior EPA officials took extraordinary steps to quash scientific dissent, and any questioning of the EPA's biosolids program.

Whitman was also apparently upset at the ombudsman office's investigation of the EPA's lackluster response to 9/11.

In January 2002, Kaufman alerted the media that after 9/11, the EPA had put New Yorkers' health at risk by failing to warn them of the danger to their health posed by the hazardous waste generated when the Twin Tower buildings collapsed.

He told the *New York Daily News*: "The evidence I have seen demonstrates that there is and was a substantial health risk that the EPA had documented in its testing. ... Mrs. Whitman's statement to the brave rescue workers and the people who live there was false."

On Jan. 9, 2002, Kaufman's boss, National Ombudsman Robert Martin, announced he was going to open an investigation into the agency's 9/11 response. Five days later, Whitman closed the ombudsman's office and appropriated the 9/11-related files. Kaufman was eventually reassigned to a paper-pushing desk job.

Due to the possibility for appeals, the courts won't resolve Kaufman's case prior to Inauguration Day 2009. Consequently, according to a PEER press release, "The fate of the National Ombudsman Office may be one of the early decisions facing the next administration seeking to reform a very troubled EPA."

In other words, Kaufman's fate rests in the hands of the EPA administrator appointed by the next president.

—Joel Bleifuss

## Five Years on Hotel Picket Line

**D**IRECTLY WEST OF Chicago's iconic Buckingham Fountain sits the Congress Hotel. Itself an icon during its heyday of the early 20th century, the Congress is now a shabbier shade of its former self. But on June 12, the city's left-labor bloc livened the place up by appearing, at first blush, to throw a raucous block party outside its doors.



**On June 12, hundreds turned out to mark the fifth anniversary of the Congress Hotel strike.**

But it wasn't a celebration. Instead, the hundreds of union workers, college students and members of religious and community groups were marking the fifth anniversary of the strike against the Congress, making it the longest active strike in the United States.

The strike's roots go back to the mid-'90s, when the Congress' ownership group pulled out of a multi-employer association that bargained for the majority of Chicago hotels. As a result, it wasn't part of the landmark September 2002 deal between UNITE HERE! and nearly all of the city's downtown hotels, that increased benefits and dramatically raised wages. (A 2006 agreement raised them again to \$13.90 an hour, 57 percent more than the 2002 wage of \$8.83 an hour that Congress pays today.)

Instead, the Congress waited to begin negotiations until days before its contract expired in January 2003. Those nego-

tiations moved slowly until the hotel proposed its final contract in May. The offer not only demanded a 7 percent wage cut and no raises through the contract's life, it refused to pay increases in health and welfare premiums, essentially eliminating health insurance and pensions. Faced with a proposal that would pay them 26 percent below the city's newly set industry standard, Congress workers voted almost unanimously to strike on June 15.

"This fight is for all the hotels in Chicago, not just the Congress," says Leticia Aritzmendi, a mother of six, whose time on the picket line almost matches the six years that she worked at the Congress as a housekeeper. "If we lose this fight, other hotels will pay the same thing."

The hotel's management has claimed that because it is independently owned, it can't afford to match the salaries offered by multinational chains. But UNITE HERE! officials are quick to point out that Congress' ownership group is headed by Albert Nasser, a member of a wealthy family whose business interests span the globe.

Nasser's family has a majority stake in Gelmart Industries, which claims to be the world's largest, privately held manufacturer of women's undergarments. The company sells these undergarments to retailers such as K-Mart and Wal-Mart. In 2004, a UNITE HERE! Local 1 delegation visited the company's factory in the Philippines, where workers described being given "impossibly" high quotas and forced to work for free if they failed to meet them.

Despite the fact that the strike has nearly crippled the Congress' business—the union estimates that the hotel's occupancy hovers at 30 percent, far below what most hotels need to stay afloat—the two sides haven't met in almost a year. And with the owners refusing to budge from their final contract proposal, no future talks are planned.

A telling instance of management's intransigence occurred a couple weeks before the June 12 rally, when an organizer from the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, a local progressive advocacy group, attempted

to deliver a letter to Shlomo Nahmias, the hotel's general manager. Signed by seven rabbis, the letter expressed their discontent with the continuing strike. When Nahmias learned of the letter's origin, he ripped it in half without reading it.

A strong show of defiance, perhaps, but not nearly as impressive as the resolve exhibited daily by former Congress housekeepers Mercedes Ayvar, Imelda Martinez, Ofelia Rubio, Celia Salgado and Maria Sandoval. Each morning at 6 a.m., the five friends arrive at the picket line outside the Congress and march until 7:30 a.m., when they leave for their new jobs at the downtown Sheraton. From 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., the women clean 16 rooms each, then return to the Congress to picket from 5 p.m. to 8:40 p.m., before catching one of the final buses leaving downtown.

"There's been a lot of walking," a smiling Ayvar said at the rally. "I haven't sat down in five years."

The twinkle in her eye suggested she wasn't planning to do so anytime soon.

—Brian Cook

## appall-o-meter

### 2.1 Kiddies Run Afoul of Fairway Wood

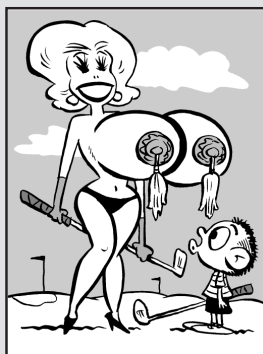
An unfortunate scheduling error had dozens of pre-teens of the Gold Crown Junior Golf Association in Broomfield, Colo., finishing a tournament as a charity event for breast cancer research was beginning.

Problem was, the charity tournament was sponsored by Shotgun Willie's, a local club that caters to the male prurient interest. And while the patrons were upstanding citizens, the caddies were strippers.

Eagle Trace Golf Course apologized for the mix-up. "I cannot tell you the girls didn't flash out there but it wasn't a free-for-all," an official reassured the public.

Still, reports the Associated Press, at least one mother had to explain to her children why "the men joining the strippers had water guns and why the

women wore only their underwear."



### 6.2 Bad Sergeant

What does it take to pass oneself off as an undercover federal agent in Gerald, Mo.? A fake badge, a crew cut and an authoritarian mien are key. And an off-white Ford Crown Victoria helps. But it's absolutely crucial to have your wife stand in for the bogus reference you submit to town authorities.

Bill A. Jakob, the man many townspeople would come to fear as "Sergeant Bill," blew into town in just such a way, befriending and gaining the trust of the police chief. Soon he had the mayor, aldermen and police believing he was a federal undercover agent sent to help tackle the local methamphetamine problem.

In the ensuing months, Jakob racked up an undisclosed number of arrests, adopting a decidedly jack-booted style. According to the Associated Press, one of the many lawsuits filed in Jakob's wake

alleges that he held a gun to a suspect's head and threatened to shoot as the man's child looked on. Another suit was filed by an old lady who was involuntarily committed to a psych ward for not cooperating with police.

Gerald's police chief has since been fired and the mayor finds himself mighty unpopular, as citizens wonder why more wasn't done to verify the identity of this mysterious newcomer. cursory background checks revealed that Jakob had been convicted of misdemeanor sexual abuse of a minor, had recently filed for bankruptcy, and had been in legal difficulties after hitting and killing a 6-year-old with his truck.

Give town officials credit, however, for placing a call to one of the numbers Jakob supplied as a reference. According to the *New York Times*, a woman answered the call with the greeting "multijurisdictional task force," and said that the town's application for federal assistance was "under review." The task force name, the *Times* surmises, was borrowed from the *Beverly Hills Cop* movies.

—Dave Mulcahey



## Don't Tase Me, GOP! snapshot

**T**HE ST. PAUL Police Department is arming itself with Tasers.

Local activists and media say that the department ordered 230 stun guns in late February—adding to the 140 already in its possession—in preparation for protests at the upcoming Republican National Convention (RNC), which St. Paul will host from Sept. 1 to Sept. 4.

Police spokesman Tom Walsh denies any connection between the arrival of the Tasers and the upcoming RNC. “They are not related to the convention in any way,” says Walsh. “A patrol officer suggested months ago that we supply our force with Tasers.”

But some demonstrators are wary of such assurances.

“Our concern is that they’ll have them and that they’ll use them,” says Marie Braun, a member of Women Against Military Madness, which has received a permit to protest in a St. Paul park on Sept. 1. “These are dangerous weapons and people have died as a result of them being used.”

Four years ago at the RNC in New York, the New York Police Department (NYPD) arrested thousands of demonstrators, holding many of them in an asbestos-filled pier on the Hudson River until the convention’s conclusion.

And at an impromptu mass march toward Madison Square Ground where President Bush’s re-election fest was being held, an NYPD officer in civilian clothing reportedly provoked a fight by driving a scooter into the crowd.

St. Paul Assistant Police Chief Matt Bostrom told the online newspaper MinnPost.com in December that no St. Paul police officers would infiltrate protest organizations, and the force will dress in regular uniforms—not riot gear—during the convention.

And spokesman Walsh insists that the department will patrol the streets of St. Paul without help from contract cops or the Secret Service, who will operate only inside the Xcel Energy Center where the convention will take place.

Nevertheless, an underground anarchist group that calls itself the “RNC Welcoming Committee” states on its website



**BAGHDAD**—An Iraqi gas station worker fills up a car on June 30, amid a sand storm. The fuel shortage has led to massive lines in front of stations and a flourishing black market. Iraqi oil officials recently announced the opening of the oil industry to foreign investment. (Photo by Wathiq Khuzaie /Getty Images)

that “the RNC, local police and federal agents are likely to get violent.”

The group and other activists cite a Critical Mass bike ride last August in neighboring Minneapolis that led to police using Tasers and pepper spray to break up the event and arrest 19 protesters. The gathering coincided with what the Welcoming Committee calls the “pReNC, a weekend of radical organizing in preparation for the RNC.”

During the subsequent trial of one cyclist, Minneapolis police Sgt. David Stichter reportedly testified that the department had created a task force to monitor Critical Mass because it knew RNC protesters would participate in the ride.

“[They have been] taking every opportunity to try and intimidate the people who live here,” says an activist using the name “Diablo Bush,” referring to the local police.

On March 13, the Welcoming Committee’s website began requesting Taser donations. So far it has received none, according to an e-mail message to *In These Times* from Diablo Bush.

“Any Tasers we do receive would be simply for day-to-day maintenance of public safety,” jokes Diablo, “and are not at all related to the RNC—just like the St. Paul Police Department’s order [of Tasers].”

In May, the Twin Cities’ alternative-weekly, *City Pages*, reported that University of Minnesota police were working with an FBI special agent to recruit “moles” to attend vegan potlucks, gain the trust of RNC protesters and report back to the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force, a partnership between federal agencies and local police.

Last summer, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* reported that the nearby Ramsey County Sheriff’s office was preparing to construct pens to hold 5,000 arrested protesters—a report Bostrom of the St. Paul police claimed was news to him.

Says Braun of Women Against Military Madness: “We have as much concern about the police as anyone, because when we look at political conventions in the past, it’s often the police that have a history of overreacting.”

— Jacob Wheeler

BY LUIS CARLOS MONTALVÁN

## Promoting Incompetence in Iraq



**S**INCE THE U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Gens. George Casey, David Petraeus and Ricardo Sanchez have not heeded the requests of their subordinate officers for more resources and more troops.

Instead, these top commanders have consistently misrepresented to Congress the strength and number of Iraqi Security Forces as Iraq falls deeper into civil war.

Their misrepresentations should be grounds for criminal indictments and courts-martial.

During my tours of duty in Iraq in 2003 and 2005, I witnessed and participated in American military operations whose metrics for success were the numbers of detainees apprehended—without regard to the tribal, ethnic and sectarian strife they caused.

Sadly, since returning home in 2006 and departing the Army on Sept. 11, 2007, I've noticed a lack of scrutiny of our top commanders.

In September 2003, I was put in charge of 80 soldiers who entered Iraq without any weapons or ammunition. We were mortared for three days in Balad, north of Baghdad, before arriving in Al Anbar province to link up with our unit. We were unable to return fire.

Later that month, we had to secure the five-kilometer border crossing at Al Waleed, the largest crossing point between Syria and Iraq, with a mere 30 to 40 troops. We were also in charge of recruiting, training and equipping Iraqi Security Forces—uniformed and equipped militias—and redeveloping the local infrastructure and economy. I wrote countless memoranda to my superiors requesting more resources and personnel, but they went unanswered.

I asked myself then as I ask myself now: How could the commanders of the greatest Army in the world send soldiers into battle without the weapons and resources to accomplish their mission?

Also at Al Waleed, I witnessed American counterintelligence soldiers waterboard a prisoner. It was disturbing and wrong. Nonetheless, I was unable to intervene.

On another occasion, my higher headquarters ordered me (unlawfully) not to offer humanitarian assistance to refugees caught between the Syrian and Iraqi borders. Doz-

ens would have died had we not disobeyed those orders.

I lost many friends in Iraq—American and Iraqi. The death toll of U.S. soldiers ticks on above 4,000, as the deaths of innocent Iraqis number in the hundreds of thousands, with millions more displaced and suffering.

In 2005, I was assigned to oversee the security of the northern half of the Syrian-Iraqi border and the port of entry at Rabiya. For that we needed an automated computer tracking system for immigration and emigration, known as a Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System, or PISCES.

At a high-level conference in Baghdad's "Red Zone" in June 2005, I was told that Coalition Forces possessed a dozen PISCES and that they would soon be installed at the ports of entry. But as of March 2006, when the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment departed western Nineveh province, no PISCES—or equivalent tracking system—had been installed at Rabiya.

The PISCES system has proven effective abroad. British authorities were able to apprehend the terrorists responsible for the London subway bombing in 2005 after PISCES tracked their movements from the Middle East to Europe.

The lack of sufficient equipment along Iraq's borders contributed to the country's instability. For four years after the invasion, foreign fighters were free to move transnationally without fear of apprehension. Many Americans and Iraqis were wounded or killed as a result.

Petraeus, for one, has been nearly impervious to scrutiny for failures in Iraq under his command. Despite those failures, many senior leaders have been promoted again and again.

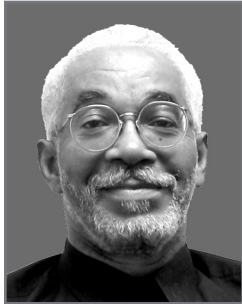
More than one year after the "surge" strategy was announced, credible voices charge that Iraq today is no better off than before. Petraeus and his "brain trust" of officers and diplomats have made every effort to convince the American and Iraqi people that progress has been made, but the reality is that their measures of success are fraught with fallacious assumptions and offer skewed perspectives.

Members of this administration, diplomats and high-level military leaders got us into this Iraq disaster. And they continue to proctor it with arrogant obstinacy and incredible incompetence. They must be held accountable. ■

**How could the commanders of the world's greatest Army send soldiers into battle without the weapons and resources to accomplish their mission?**

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

## Chicago's Olympic Dreams Undeserved



**C**HICAGO MAYOR RICHARD M. Daley has set his sights on winning the gold for his city.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) recently chose the Windy City as one of four international finalists in the race to host the coveted 2016 summer games.

But a group of local activists argues that a history of racist police torture has made Chicago inappropriate as an Olympic site and is mobilizing to convince the IOC to reject the city's bid.

"How can a city that has been condemned by the United Nations for allowing its police to engage in systematic torture of black men be worthy of hosting the Olympic games?" asks Patricia Hill, a primary organizer of Black People Against Police Torture, the group at the forefront of opposition to the Chicago Olympics.

Hill, who is also executive director of the city's African American Police League, says that several allied groups have joined in opposition to Chicago's Olympic bid—including the local chapter of Amnesty International USA.

For nearly 20 years, a former Chicago police commander named Jon Burge and detectives under his command routinely tortured more than 100 black males, claiming they were criminal suspects. Several independent investigations and court decisions confirmed these systematic crimes, which occurred from 1972 to 1991.

The latest evidence was a 292-page report issued two years ago by court-appointed special prosecutor Edward Egan that concluded Burge and his men used many torture techniques, including electro-shocking genitals, suffocating people with plastic bags and burning skin on a hot radiator. But the statute of limitations prevented prosecution. Thus, none of the cops involved has yet to pay any legal cost.

Groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International condemned these crimes, which violate domestic laws, the victims' constitutional rights, as well as international treaties banning torture. In May 2006, the U.N. Committee Against Torture sharply rebuked the United States for failing to hold the offending police officers accountable.

Despite widespread awareness of torture provoked by American excesses in the so-called war on terror, relatively

little has been said about this heinous history of homegrown torture. Former Illinois Gov. George Ryan raised the profile of the case in 2003 when he granted pardons to four death row inmates after concluding their confessions were tortured from them. However, about 26 prisoners are still incarcerated because of confessions forced by Burge's corps of torturers. Protesters are also demanding new evidentiary hearings and perhaps reparations for the victims.

Are Americans less concerned about police torture because it involved mostly black men, whose perceived image as criminals allows us to tolerate their abuse? For many, even the most egregious police abuse of black men is viewed as a necessary evil.

Black People Against Police Torture hopes to demonstrate that the cost for brutalizing black men has increased. "Daley took something away from us, when he refused to act on charges of police torture in 1982 when he was state's attorney," Hill notes.

"And now we want to take something away from him."

Hill's group decided to oppose the city's Olympic bid after the 2006 report concluded that nothing could be done to prosecute the perpetrators of police torture. "After spending four years, conducting more than 700 interviews and spending at least \$6 million, the report came up with nothing," says Lawrence Kennon, a Chicago attorney who has been involved in the case since its inception and is a member of Hill's group. "It was an insult to the people of Chicago."

The tactic has apparently triggered additional action. According to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, in June, a federal grand jury subpoenaed retired detectives who worked with Burge. The office of U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald is reportedly conducting the probe and focusing on the sworn statements Burge and other detectives made during depositions in 2003. Those statements are not restricted by the statute of limitations and if they can be proven false, Burge and his henchmen could face prosecution under obstruction of justice charges. But Hill says the anti-Olympics protests will continue even if the feds prosecute Burge and his men.

"Daley and his cronies have yet to learn the lesson that you cannot brutalize black men with impunity," she says. "Look at the current rash of police shootings and brutality in our communities. If we have to deny Daley the object of his desire to teach that lesson, so be it." ■

**Despite widespread awareness of torture provoked by excesses in the war on terror, little is said about the history of homegrown torture.**



# DROPPIN' A DIME

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

## Gun-toters in La-La Land



**T**HE CONSERVATIVE ANSWER to America's crime plague is to put more guns on the streets. If that's not counterintuitive, I don't know what is.

The U.S. Supreme Court's June 26 rejection of Washington, D.C.'s gun ban is an antediluvian retreat into la-la land. Its decision to strike down the 32-year-old law has put America's cities in jeopardy,

and that should be anathema to progressives everywhere. Still, the Democratic presidential nominee, Sen. Barack Obama (Ill.), is playing a telling game of hot potato.

The court rejected D.C.'s strict gun law by a 5-4 vote. In the majority opinion, Justice Antonin (Big Tony) Scalia wrote that the U.S. Second Amendment does not permit "the absolute prohibition of handguns held and used for self-defense in the home." In

other words, to keep America safe, we have to extend the right to bear arms from the military to pops having a beer on the couch in the living room.

Gun advocates are gleeful at the prospect of putting us in the crosshairs. The gun lovers want a firearm under every bed, in every drawer, in every holster in the nation.

"This is a very frightening decision for America," Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley said after the court's decision. He's dead-on.

America is the most heavily armed nation in the world. U.S. citizens own 270 million of the world's 875 million known firearms—90 guns for every 100 citizens, according to a 2007 survey by the Geneva-based Graduate Institute of International Studies.

In 2005, more than 10,000 homicides—almost 68 percent of all murders—were firearm-related, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

That's not enough slaughter for the People of the Gun. The National Rifle Association (NRA) has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into ensuring that our national Weapon of Mass Destruction is as accessible as a pack of gum.

The 217-year-old Second Amendment declares that "a well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." I am no Constitutional scholar, but

that spare passage does not read like an explicit embrace of individual gun ownership to me.

Many others agree. So listen for the "ching, ching," sweet sound of cash as both sides of the debate scramble to file a flurry of legal challenges that will tie up the courts for years.

Scalia added that "nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on long-standing prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places, such as schools and government buildings."

What a relief. Just don't stop at your local Mickey D's for a Big Mac or run to the post office or the *Safeway* down the street. Then you're on your own.

The People of the Gun don't have to live in the cities that

are desperate to stay safe. The mothers of Chicago's Englewood, Miami's Overtown and D.C.'s Anacostia are losing their boys and girls by the dozens to guns that are peddled at countless gun shows and gun

**Obama touts his community organizing on Chicago's streets. He might recognize the blood of blacks and Latinos running in those streets.**

shops outside city limits.

No matter. It's just black folks. Nearly half of people murdered in the United States in 2005 were African Americans. While blacks make up about 13 percent of the nation's population, they make up 49 percent of all murder victims, according to a recent U.S. Justice Department report. Guns are the weapon of choice.

Back to Obama's hot potato. While I don't expect much from the NRA, we should expect more from the Big O. I expect more than his pathetic pandering in the name of protecting his presidential prospects.

Obama boasts about his stint as a community organizer on Chicago's mean streets. So he might recognize the blood of black and Latino children running in those streets. He's not too busy pandering to know that every single day, dozens of shootings fell urbanites across America.

Yet he essentially agreed with the Supreme Court.

"I have always believed that the Second Amendment protects the right of individuals to bear arms," he said soon after the ruling, "but I also identify with the need for crime-ravaged communities to save their children from the violence that plagues our streets through common-sense, effective safety measures. The Supreme Court has now endorsed that view."

It's a classic election year dodge. ■

# Let Them Eat Free Markets

## How deregulation fuels the global food crisis

BY DAVID MOBERG

**I**N APRIL, CROWDS OF angry Haitians—reduced to eating mud cakes to staunch hunger—erupted in deadly protests against high food prices, forcing the prime minister to resign. The price of rice, a staple of the Haitian diet, had risen 16 percent on the world market last year, then shot up 141 percent from January to April.

Around the world, similar riots—or fears of them—have pushed governments to restrict exports, reduce tariffs, attack hoarding and take other desperate measures as prices of virtually all major food commodities have spiked—and often fluctuated wildly.

But in the months since Haitians hit the streets, leaders of the major international financial organizations—the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO)—as well as the Bush administration and European Union (EU) have responded weakly to the crisis. Mainly, they've issued underfunded appeals for emergency aid and for speedy conclusion of the latest round of WTO free-trade negotiations. For the world's poor, that's like lifting a drowning man out of the water, only to tie weights around his ankles and shove him back in.

When world leaders met in June for a U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization summit, says Steve Suppan, senior policy analyst for the Minneapolis-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), a research and advocacy group, "there was an urgent recognition of the food crisis but a more urgent sense of the need to salvage neoliberalism."

And Raj Patel, author of the recent



THONY BELIZAIRE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

As the food crisis in Haiti worsens—and rice and bean prices have increased 100 percent—many turn to clay 'biscuits' as a source of food. The clay is mixed with salt and vegetable fat, then dried in the sun.

book, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World's Food System* (See review on page 40), adds, "It's preposterous that the Bush administration and EU are pushing us toward precisely the policies that got us into this mess."

Many developments may have triggered the food price crisis, including bad weather conditions (from droughts in Australia to more recent floods in the Midwest), oil price increases, and rising biofuel and consumer demand.

But the current food crisis ultimately stems from over-reliance on deregulated global markets and increasingly concentrated corporate control of an ecologically unsound world food system. Pushing free-market fundamentalism harder will only intensify the fault lines, setting the stage for even more serious crises in the future.

### All markets are not the same

Agriculture and food markets aren't like markets for clothes or automobiles. Food is a daily essential, which consumes as much as two-thirds of the income of the poorest half of the world.

Many of those poor people are also peasants who rely on food production for their livelihoods. Farming depends on the whims of nature and slowly adjusted, seasonal plans. Agriculturalists don't merely turn out a product for the market; they play a major role in environmental conservation or degradation and the definition of people's cultures.

What's more, wide disparities in power, financial resources and information exist between the many small producers and the handful of giant multinationals that control grain trade (like Cargill), hybrid seeds (like Monsanto), chemi-

cals (like DuPont), wholesale markets (like Archer Daniels Midland) and retail markets (like Wal-Mart or Carrefour).

Add to that the distortions of markets in favor of the giants through governmental policies and the growing role of huge speculative investors.

"The markets are not perfect, and they can't be," says Sophia Murphy, senior adviser on trade for IATP. "The orthodoxy that drove liberalization of agriculture didn't take account of the way markets don't behave the way a neoclassical model of the economy behaves, and didn't allow for regulation that needs to make up for agricultural market failures."

But the rush to free-market fundamentalism has stripped governments of many of the tools they need—such as maintaining grain reserves—to produce price stability, equity, environmental sustainability and widespread human social development.

Haiti is a case in point. In the early '80s, Haiti, though a poor country, produced nearly enough rice for its own population. But when a popular uprising overthrew Jean-Claude Duvalier's dictatorship, the new government turned to the IMF for loans. However, the IMF conditions for loans—and later "structural adjustment programs"—included cutting tariffs on rice.

Heavily subsidized rice from the United States flooded into Haiti, bankrupting many small farmers. Then U.S. food aid further undermined Haitian agricultural self-sufficiency.

Haiti now has among the fewest trade restrictions in the Americas, and produces only about 18 percent of its domestic rice needs, making its population—four-fifths living on less than \$2 a day—extremely vulnerable to global price run-ups. However, Haiti's tiny rich elite prospers as the middlemen in this grain trade.

### **'Laughing all the way to the bank'**

The story is similar throughout the developing world. From roughly 1950 to 1972, the U.S. government opened up markets and created dependency

on global grain purchases by providing subsidized, low-cost surplus grain. Governments could pay with their local currencies, rather than dollars, and the United States used that soft-money income to finance its global, Cold War political and military objectives. The governments of developing countries willingly accepted the aid, hoping to pacify their urban poor while keeping wages low for new industries.

At around roughly the same period, the "green revolution" took place, which replaced traditional polyculture—farming many food products from small plots—with larger monoculture of crops that are more dependent on fertilizer, purchased hybrid seed and irrigation. The shift raised rice yields per farmer but did not increase pounds of food produced per acre, according to Eric Holt-Gimenez, executive director of Food First, an Oakland-based research and advocacy group. It did, however, concentrate land ownership, move poor farmers onto marginal lands and increase the role of multinational agribusinesses.

Then, in the '80s, World Bank and IMF loans, as well as structural adjustment programs, required that countries not only reduce tariffs and other trade barriers but also dismantle grain reserves, marketing boards and other government institutions designed to stabilize food prices.

Free-trade agreements in the '90s locked in and further dismantled regulations of farming and food markets, especially in developing countries, even as farmers in Europe and the United States were able to keep many of their protections.

As countries tried to repay their foreign debts and buy imported food, they were forced to turn to commercial agriculture, most often large, industrial agricultural enterprises owned by foreign corporations.

With the world supposedly awash in cheap food, there was a sharp decline in international and national investment in agriculture for the local market, including basic research, often under budget-cutting pressure from the IMF.

Also over the past decade, govern-

ments, again under IMF prodding, have let grain reserve stocks drop to the lowest point in several decades.

Millions of small farmers were pushed off the land and into cities or into international migration—2 million in Mexico alone, since NAFTA was implemented in 1994.

Many developing countries that had earlier fed their own populations became less self-sufficient. In Africa, governments, international investors, and organizations financed the import of grain and the export of specialty crops. But they failed to invest in roads, refrigerated storage and other technology to get local food to urban markets, Suppan says, leaving 40 percent of all food produced to rot in the fields—depriving urban dwellers of food, farmers of income and nations of potential for homegrown economic development.

Meanwhile, big corporations continue to rake in huge profits. "The industry is not in crisis at all," Holt-Gimenez says. "They're laughing all the way to the bank."

The global grain trade was supposed to take the place of governments with their reserves stored for hard times, such as when an Australian drought in recent years reduced rice and wheat exports to Asia.

"But the private market has very little interest in managing a reserve," Murphy says. "Why would they? They don't care about the price. They don't eat food; they sell it to the highest bidder. They're only interested in getting food before the competition does."

### **Partial explanations**

If world grain reserves had been higher, the recent unusual weather might have had little effect, although climate change does pose a major threat to food production and prices in the long run.

China, which resisted much outside neoliberal pressure, maintained substantial rice reserves and has preserved much greater price stability. But as part of joining the WTO, it relaxed restrictions on soybean imports. The world's largest soy importer now suffers from price spikes and from growing concentration of foreign control over soy oil



processing. Yet contrary to the argument that the recent price hike is a result of increased meat (and grain) consumption by the rising Chinese middle class, China has increased production and continues to supply most of its own growing food consumption.

Biofuels have increased demand, accounting for somewhere in the range of 3 percent (the U.S. Department of Agriculture's estimate) to 30 percent (International Food Policy Research Institute estimate) of recent price hikes.

But the impact is complex: Using corn for ethanol, regardless of questions about its wisdom, doesn't boost rice prices—and has limited impact on meat prices because the waste mash from distilling is used to feed cattle.

Originally encouraged to use up European and American surpluses, biofuels were seen by many farm and environmental advocates as a potential locally controlled and sustainable business. But biofuels now threaten to become a global, corporate-controlled industrial farming and export business that may put fuel for American SUVs in competition with food for poor people in other countries, all while degrading tropical forests.

The boom in energy prices—oil for production and transport, natural gas for fertilizers—boosts food costs and is likely to have even greater significance on prices in the future. But that's partly a consequence of free-market failures to properly account for the costs of dependence on cheap oil, including the threat climate change poses to tropical agriculture.

### **The main culprit: changing futures markets**

Yet changes in supply, demand and agricultural costs don't adequately account for the huge price spikes.

An EU study earlier this year concluded that certain food commodities had increased in price three times more than agricultural markets would explain. One possible reason: speculation in commodity markets.

Agriculture futures markets provide farmers and industrial users of farm

products a chance to lock in prices for future delivery. This provides a hedge against damaging price fluctuations and helps to set an openly known market price. Small-scale speculators help provide liquidity for such markets.

But deregulation of American commodity markets in both energy and agriculture in the late '80s and early '90s expanded

## **Many farm and environmental advocates saw biofuels as a sustainable business. But biofuels have now become a global, corporate-controlled business that threaten tropical agriculture.**

the ways in which companies could make trades without federal regulation.

Other regulatory changes made it possible for large investors, including institutional investors like pension funds, to buy agricultural futures without limits. Congress had imposed such limits to prevent manipulation of the relatively small futures markets—much as Enron did with California electricity rates.

In recent years, these big investors have increasingly bought futures indexes and other bundled futures products as part of a diversification of their holdings. But these investments behave entirely unlike the traditional futures buying and selling by farmers and grain users.

As hedge fund manager Michael Masters explained to Congress in May, these investors—with an estimated \$250 billion now invested in commodity futures—tend to hold their investments like a stock or bond, not trade in search of the appropriate market price. They thus skew the price upward, regardless of supply and demand of the real product. As the price increases, more money flows in, pushing the price even higher.

Eventually, such a commodity bubble will burst—as the housing and dot-com bubbles burst—but with harsh consequences for real people.

While Congress has begun to close some of the regulatory loopholes, speculation still magnifies real-world food price increases. Once again, free-market fundamentalism creates real economy

failures—taking food out of hungry people's mouths.

### **The rise of food sovereignty**

As long as the food system is organized around free-trade policy and maximizing private profits, Suppan and Murphy argue, it will exacerbate volatility, inequity and environmental damage.

What's needed, says Murphy, is “not just a redistribution of wealth but a new model of agriculture and a new model of consumption.”

Food sovereignty advocates propose that people—local communities and nations—should have the right to make decisions about their own food regimes, including how much and what to import and export, and whether to use the genetically modified crops that agribusiness pushes as a false solution to the current crisis.

“The food riots are calling for two things,” Patel says. “Obviously food, but also accountable government.” Under global trade agreements, many governments have lost that accountability to their people.

A new food regime also needs an alternative to current industrial farming, with its ever more costly and damaging practices and growing concentration of profit from feeding the world. This alternative agro-ecological model would rely on the productivity and resilience of small farmers.

Earlier this year, a U.N. commission of 400 agricultural experts concluded that the world needed to shift from agricultural business-as-usual to a more ecological and small-scale approach. To no one's surprise, the U.S. government and agribusiness refused to endorse its recommendations.

How many more food riots will it take to change their minds? ■

# McCain's War on Women

BY KATE SHEPPARD

**S**EN. JOHN MCCAIN'S (R-ARIZ.) campaign and the media would have us believe that herds of disaffected women voters will be stampeding to the Republicans this year because a woman candidate won't be on the presidential ballot in November.

McCain's campaign has been making a clear play for women voters in recent weeks, hosting conference calls with Republican women and touting that his policies on national security, the economy and healthcare appeal to women voters.

But the suggestion that women—and feminist women, at that—will be lining up behind him is a fairytale. At least, it should be. McCain's record and policies on issues of importance to women are neither moderate nor maverick.

In *The Nation*, Katha Pollitt put it simply: “[T]o vote for McCain, a feminist would have to be insane.”

But the chatter about the voting decisions of former presidential candidate Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) supporters continues. Much of the recent talk has focused on PUMAs (the acronym stands for “Party Unity My Ass”), a group supposedly so angry about the Democratic primary that they won't vote for Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.). But as blogger Amanda Marcotte reported, PUMA PAC was started by a McCain donor, accord-

ing to the Federal Election Commission.

That doesn't mean there aren't angry Clinton voters. But the number of progressive or even moderate voters who would seriously consider voting for McCain is much smaller than the media would have you believe. Unfortunately, McCain's propaganda seems to be working, at least on those who aren't aware of his record on issues of concern to women voters.

A February Planned Parenthood poll of 1,205 women voters in 16 battleground states found that 50 percent of women voters don't know McCain's position on abortion, and that 49 percent of women who backed McCain were pro-choice. Forty-six percent of women supporting McCain said they'd like to see *Roe v. Wade* upheld—though McCain says he supports overturning the decision. When they learned of his position on *Roe*, 36 percent of women who identified as both pro-choice and likely McCain voters said they would be less likely to vote for him.

These moderate, often suburban, middle-class women could be critical swing voters this election. At the time of the Planned Parenthood poll, Obama held only a 5 percentage-point margin over McCain with its swing-state demographic, 41 percent to 36 percent.

Planned Parenthood concludes that these findings suggest “that just filling in McCain's actual voting record and his publicly stated positions on a handful of key issues has the potential to diminish his total vote share among battleground women

voters by about 17 to 20 percentage points.”

“The only reason [McCain is] saying he's going after Clinton voters is because if he doesn't win their votes, he's not going to win this election,” says Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood. “Even though I think it's a real wash-up for him, he's got to find some more voters somewhere. That's the political math here.”

## On the record

One reason many pro-choice women are confused about McCain is because he has flip-flopped on the abortion issue.

In 1999, McCain said he backed *Roe*: “Certainly, in the short term, or even the long term, I would not support repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, which would then force X number of women in America to [undergo] illegal and dangerous operations.”

But on NBC's “Meet the Press” in May 2007, responding to a question about his statements in 1999, McCain said: “Well, it was in the context of conversation about having to change the culture of America as regards to this issue. I have stated time after time after time that *Roe v. Wade* was a bad decision.”

NARAL Pro-Choice America President Nancy Keenan says his shifting rhetoric is an attempt to “game” the electorate and confuse voters about his actual stances. “[The McCain campaign] knows full well that women in America, especially independent and pro-choice women, will not support a candidate who wants to overturn *Roe v. Wade*,” Keenan says. “So



they're still trying to make the case that he's a moderate and a maverick, when his record proves that he is neither."

The record also shows that McCain has rarely strayed outside Republican Party line on the issue of choice. He has consistently voted against measures to provide access to contraception and sex-education, and voted to approve anti-choice judges.

Planned Parenthood and NARAL have each given him a zero for his record on

consistent," McCain told *The National Review*, a conservative magazine, last year. "And I've got a consistent zero from NARAL throughout all those years. ... My record is clear." He has also bragged to the media that his record has "been pro-life, unchanging and unwavering."

On the campaign trail this year, he has been adamant, telling MSNBC's Chris Matthews in April that "the rights of the unborn is one of my most important values."

amend the definition of those eligible for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to include the unborn—while voting against legislation to expand SCHIP's coverage to low-income children and pregnant women at least six times.

In 2003, he voted for a ban on so-called "partial-birth abortions." And in 2004, he supported the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, which makes it a criminal offense to harm or kill a fetus while committing a

## **McCain has pledged that if elected president, he would appoint Supreme Court justices who would overturn *Roe*, saying in an earlier Republican debate he 'will try to find clones of Alito and Roberts.'**

women's health issues. (The record dates back to his days in the House of Representatives, between 1983 and 1986, and carries through to his career in the U.S. Senate, which began in 1987.) Of the 130 congressional votes related to reproductive freedom that McCain has cast, 125 have been anti-choice, according to NARAL.

It's a record McCain says he's proud of—when he's not trying to appeal to women outside his Republican base.

"I have many, many votes and it's been

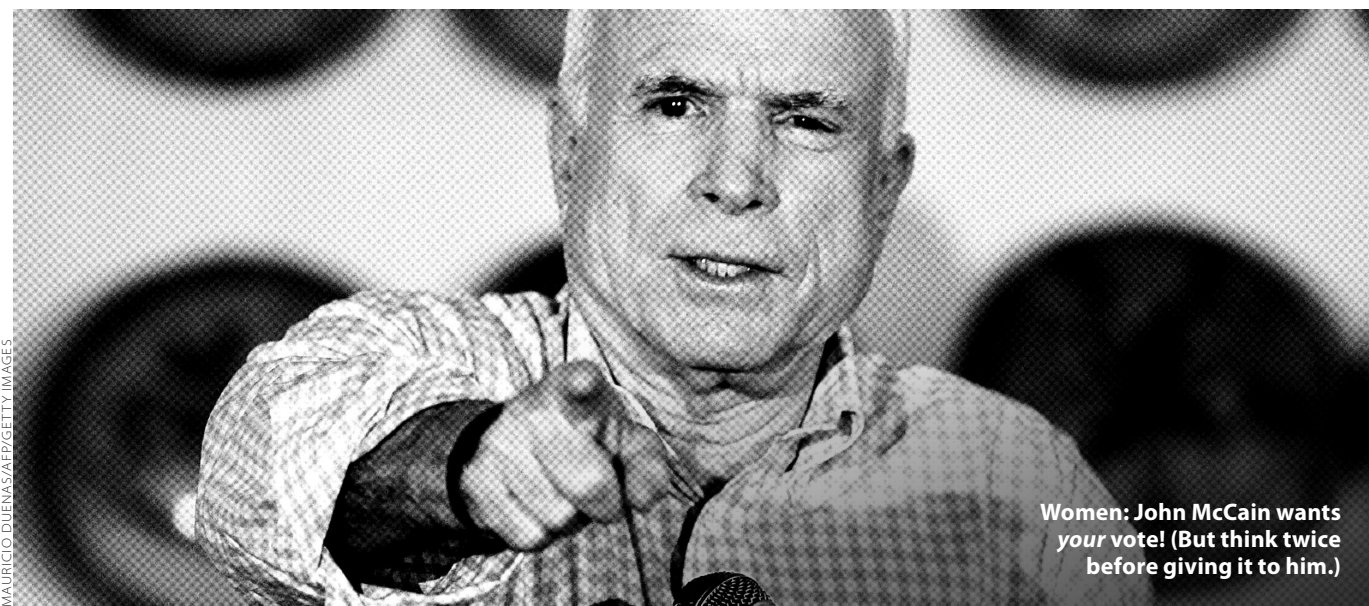
And McCain has pledged that if elected president, he will appoint Supreme Court justices who would overturn *Roe*. In February, he said he "will try to find clones of [Justice Samuel] Alito and [Chief Justice John] Roberts"—two conservative Bush administration appointees—to fill high court vacancies.

He has worked his pro-life ideology into other aspects of federal decisions. Perhaps the most preposterous example is his voting in favor of legislation to

violent crime—essentially deeming the fetus a person in the eyes of the law.

In July 2006, McCain voted for legislation that would fine and/or imprison physicians who perform abortions on out-of-state minors if there are parental notification requirements in their home state. In October 2007, he voted for legislation that would cut Health and Human Services grants to organizations that perform abortions.

McCain is no better when it comes to the issues of providing access to contra-



**Women: John McCain wants your vote! (But think twice before giving it to him.)**

MAURICIO DUENAS/AP/GETTY IMAGES



ception, family planning information and basic women's healthcare. He has voted to require parental consent for teenagers who want access to contraceptives, and against an amendment to the Senate's 2006 budget that would have allocated \$100 million for the prevention of teen pregnancy by providing education and contraceptives.

He also opposed legislation requiring that abstinence-only programs be medically accurate and based in science. He voted to abolish funding for birth control and gynecological care for low-income women, and against funding for public education on emergency contraception.

He also voted against a measure that would require insurance companies to cover prescription contraception, despite the fact that many currently fund male reproductive pharmaceuticals, such as Viagra.

And he supports President Bush's restoration of the "global gag rule"—which cuts off federal funding for nongovernmental organizations that provide abortion services and information—and he opposes funding international family planning, in general. Yet he doesn't seem particularly well-informed on the subject.

In March 2007, the *New York Times'* Adam Nagourney asked McCain whether grants for sex education in the United States include instructions about using contraceptives, or if they should abide by

Bush's abstinence-only policy.

After a pause, McCain responded, "Ahhh. I think I support the president's policy."

Nagourney followed up: "So no contraception, no counseling on contraception? Just abstinence. Do you think contraceptives help stop the spread of HIV?"

After another pause, McCain replied, "You've stumped me."

McCain is confused about his stance on the issue of choice overall, according to other accounts. In the 2000 primary, he was asked what he would do if his daughter Meghan, then 15, became pregnant. McCain said it would be a "family decision."

"The final decision would be made by Meghan with our advice and counsel," McCain said, referring to himself and his wife, Cindy. When reporters suggested that this view made him, in fact, pro-choice, McCain became irritated. "I don't think it is the pro-choice position to say that my daughter and my wife and I will discuss something that is a family matter that we have to decide."

McCain's record on women "undermines any thought that he is a moderate or that he is someone more independent," says Planned Parenthood's Richards. "Unlike George [W.] Bush, who really had no voting record on anything, Sen. McCain has a record he has to stand by, and it's a very consistent one."

But others, including Jennifer Stockman, co-chair of Republican Majority for Choice, an organization that works to elect pro-choice Republicans, says she believes McCain would be better than Bush in the White House.

"There's more hope with McCain," Stockman says, "because of his genuine interest in being more common-sense centered and to reach out to independents and to the majority of the Republican Party [who] are people like us rather than pander to the social conservatives."

But Stockman says her group isn't going to endorse McCain, and she herself still isn't sure whether she's going to vote for anyone this year. Like many, she says she doesn't really understand where McCain's is coming from, since he's not outwardly religious, nor has he displayed a desire to pander to social conservatives on other issues.

"I don't understand, knowing him, why he's been so anti-choice," says Stockman. "His voting record doesn't really make sense to me, honestly."

But she adds that chances are, as in previous years, social conservatives will commandeer the GOP's platform and make sure anti-choice language is a centerpiece.

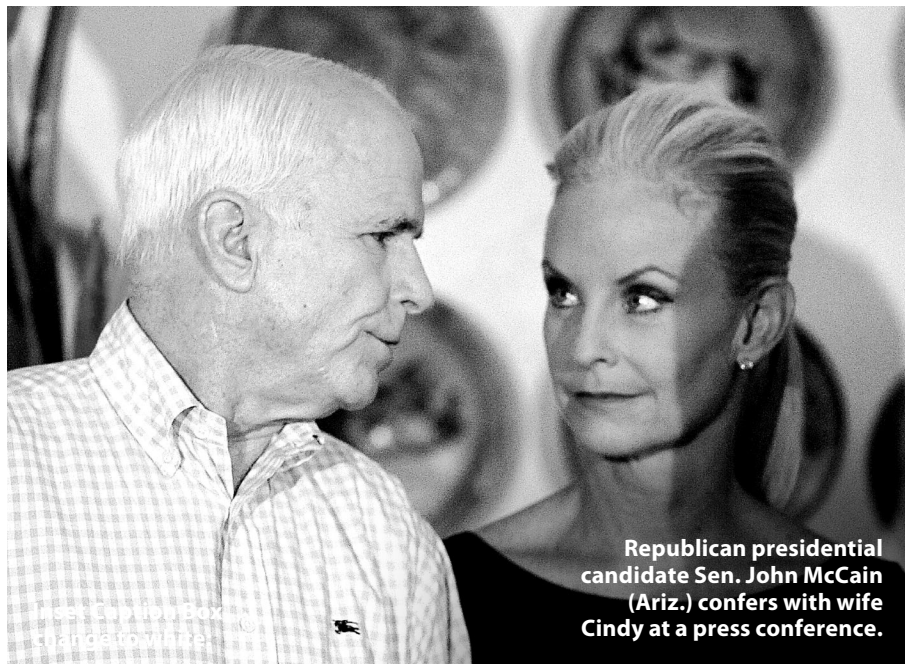
## Education and training

McCain has an equally dismal record on other issues central to women's lives—pay equity, fighting workplace discrimination, and supporting programs that help working mothers and their families.

In April, he skipped the vote on the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Had it passed the Senate, this bill would have restored the interpretation of the protections for pay equity in the Civil Rights Act that was overturned in a 5-4 Supreme Court ruling.

Though he didn't vote, he spoke against the bill on the campaign trail, saying in New Orleans: "They need the education and training, particularly since more and more women are heads of their households, as much or more than anybody else. And it's hard for them to leave their families when they don't have somebody to take care of them."

In addition to suggesting women need to be taken care of, the statement shows a total lack of understanding of the case. Lilly Ledbetter had worked for nearly 20



Republican presidential candidate Sen. John McCain (Ariz.) confers with wife Cindy at a press conference.

years at a Goodyear Tires plant in Gadsden, Ala., before she discovered that she was being paid less than her male counterparts—despite having received awards for her performance. She brought an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint against the company to rectify the situation, but the court ruled that employees have only 180 days from when payroll decisions are made to file a wage-discrimination complaint.

McCain's allegation that Ledbetter's prob-

and families. Although he initially opposed the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy, McCain has now flipped.

In 1993, before voting in favor of the Family and Medical Leave Act—which, among other things, allows pregnant women to take unpaid maternity leave if it's not automatically offered in the workplace—McCain sought to weaken the measure. He proposed allowing the government to suspend the law if it found that the act would increase the cost to business.

McCain's face reddened, and he responded, 'At least I don't plaster on the makeup like a trollop, you cunt.'" (Schechter confirmed this remark with three reporters who were present when it was made.)

And at a 1998 Republican Senate fundraiser, McCain proffered this "joke": "Why is Chelsea Clinton so ugly?" Answer: "Because her father is Janet Reno."

Then, there is McCain's response to a questioner in Hilton Head, S.C., last November, who asked, referring to Sen.

## **McCain's personal interactions with women? At a 1998 Republican Senate fundraiser, he proffered this 'joke': 'Why is Chelsea Clinton so ugly?' Answer: 'Because her father is Janet Reno.'**

lem was in her preparation for the job is, at best, misinformed. At worst, it expresses ignorance of the reality of discriminatory practices against women in the workplace.

"It's not because of training and education; it's because of discrimination," says NOW Executive Vice President Olga Vives. "And he doesn't seem to get that."

The candidate, however, has said repeatedly that he's in favor of pay equity—though there is little in his record or his platform to suggest he supports it.

"Regarding women's rights, this guy really doesn't see it," Vives says. "There's no indication in his record before then or now that he's going to be supporting the issues that are very important to women, including economic issues and health."

On civil rights issues, his record, again, is poor. He has voted in favor of banning affirmative action hiring for jobs funded by the federal government, and says he's against policies that might result in "quotas"—an oft-repeated conservative excuse for not supporting policies that rectify systemic inequities. In the first session of 109th Congress, he voted with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's positions only 7 percent of the time.

On the economic front, McCain's platform suggests he'd perpetuate many of the Bush-era policies that have done little for low- and middle-income women

and families. His record on broader health issues for women and families isn't any better. McCain voted at least six times to reduce, eliminate or restrict health insurance programs for low-income children and pregnant women. In August 2007, he again voted against a bill to expand coverage of SCHIP.

In 2000, he voted against providing tax credits to small businesses that offer health insurance to their employees—the same year he voted against a \$3,000 tax credit to help seniors and their families cover long-term care.

In 1995 and 1999, he voted against measures that provided additional funding for home and community-based health-care providers. And he has voted seven times for measures that cut or restricted funding for Medicaid, and 18 times for measures that cut or restricted Medicare.

"It's a typical conservative approach," Vives says. "As we know, that doesn't bode well for the common ordinary person, more than half of whom are women. It's the same old story of trickle-down economics."

### **The personal is political**

Then there's what we know about McCain's personal interactions with women. In his book *The Real McCain*, Cliff Schechter describes one stop during his 1992 Senate reelection bid. He writes, "At one point, Cindy playfully twirled McCain's hair and said, 'You're getting a little thin up there.'"

Clinton: "How do we beat the bitch?" McCain responded: "Excellent question."

During this election campaign, McCain has taken to talking up the sexual conquests of his youth, perhaps to appeal himself to younger voters. In March, he told a crowd in Meridian, Miss.: "I remember with affection the unruly passions of youth." He then regaled them with a story of his exploits organizing an off-base toga party for his military pals and local girls.

In another campaign stop in Pensacola, Fla., McCain recalled his days as a Florida-based fighter pilot—dating an exotic dancer known as the "Flame of Florida" and "blowing my pay at Trader Jon's," a local strip club. Abstinence-only must not apply for the boys.

### **Not an easy fix**

As Republican Majority for Choice's Stockman notes, if more women get wind of his record on women's issues, he'll have a problem.

"McCain's going to have to come up with reasoning about his voting record and what he really believes without flip-flopping," says Stockman. "It's very challenging for him. I don't know how he's going to handle it." ■

**KATE SHEPPARD** is the political reporter for *Grist*. She has also written for *The American Prospect*, *Bitch*, *the Guardian* and *MSN*.



# THE RAT TRAP

## Death row exonerations expose failings of the 'snitch system'

BY CHRISTOPHER MORAFF

**L**EVON JONES IS SUPPOSED to be dead. If the state of North Carolina had its way, Jones, 49, would have been strapped to a gurney years ago, hooked to an IV and pumped full of a lethal, three-drug cocktail until he asphyxiated.

Instead, on May 2, he walked out of prison a free man after spending 13 years on death row, and another 24 months locked up awaiting retrial—all for a murder he almost certainly did not commit.

Jones—known to friends and family as “Bo”—was released with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union’s (ACLU) Capital Punishment Project after the prosecution’s star witness recanted her testimony against him. (Lovely Lorden, a former girlfriend, admitted she’d collected \$4,000 in reward money in exchange for testifying against Jones.)

He was an easy target: an African-American ex-con with a history of mental illness and violent behavior. When Lorden came forward with her story—a full three years after the 1987 shooting of a local bootlegger named Leamon Grady—Jones was doing time on an unrelated assault charge.

The prosecution felt little obligation to question the veracity of Lorden’s claim. And if the witness is to be believed today, investigators actually helped her keep her story straight.

As a result of Lorden’s testimony—and despite the lack of physical evidence tying him to the crime—a jury convicted Jones in 1993 and he was sentenced to die for Grady’s killing.

What Jones’ attorneys didn’t know at the time—and, as it turns out, didn’t really bother trying to uncover—is that Lovely

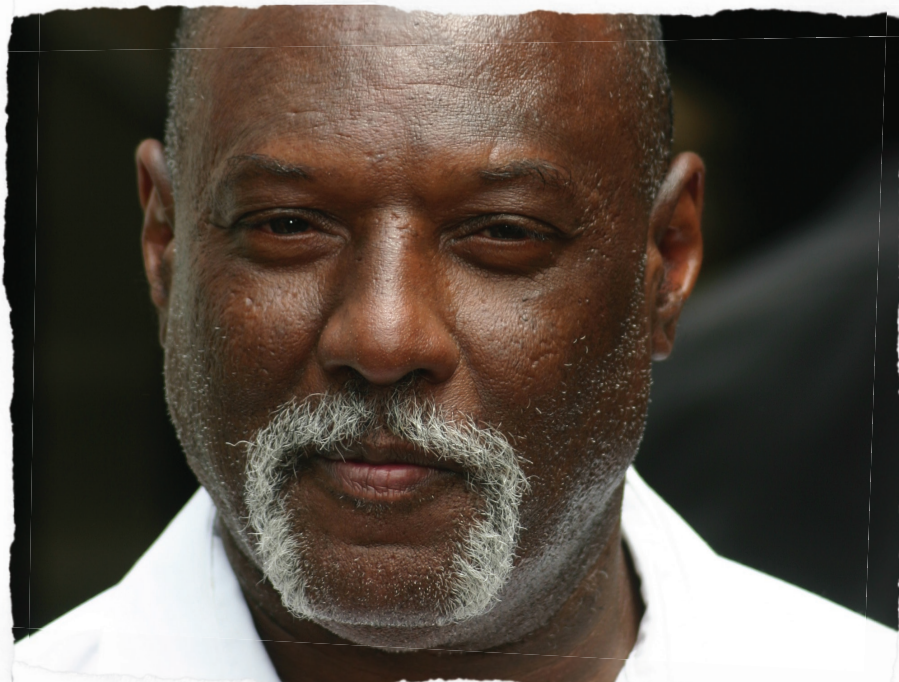


PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER MORAFF

**Levon Jones was freed from North Carolina's death row in May after a paid informant recanted her testimony.**

Lorden had made something of a career out of testifying against people close to her. By her own admission, she has aided law enforcement in dozens of investigations and says she helped police make cases against several other boyfriends, as well as her own brother and sons.

What’s more, her work as a confidential informant didn’t stop after Jones was sent to death row. Jones’ attorneys sent *In These Times* copies of receipts that show Lorden was paid money at least seven times for her work as a confidential informant from December 2003 to April 2004, while Jones sat in jail.

Today, Lorden contends she testified against Jones under pressure from the police, in particular Dalton Jones (no relation), the lead officer in the case.

That doesn’t surprise Jones’ ACLU attorney, Brian Stull, who says it’s not un-

common for police to find a suspect first and worry about making a case later.

“I think often times they look at the usual suspects,” Stull says. “I think Dalton Jones was thinking, ‘This is a dangerous person, and whether he did it or whether he didn’t, I’m going to get him off the street.’”

Jones owes his freedom in part to an astute federal judge who sensed something amiss with Lorden’s testimony during a 2006 penalty appeal.

In granting Jones a new trial, U.S. District Judge Terrence Boyle, of the Eastern District of North Carolina, noted Lorden’s statements to police were “riddled with inconsistencies” and “reflect that Lorden is unable to fairly and reliably describe the circumstances of the offense.”

Unfortunately, the case of Levon Jones is not an anomaly. He is the fifth death row prisoner to be exonerated in the past



year. Since December, North Carolina alone has released three inmates from death row after it was determined that they did not commit the crimes for which they were convicted. Of these three men, two, including Jones, were convicted on the false testimony of snitches.

The other, Jonathon Hoffman, was released in December 2007 after spending seven years on death row. His freedom came when the prosecution's key witness—Hoffman's cousin—admitted that he had lied to get back at Hoffman for stealing money and had been both paid for his testimony and given a reduced sentence for bank robbery. At the time of Hoffman's trial, prosecutors withheld the deal from defense attorneys, the jury and even the judge.

### A recipe for disaster

In a country where more than one out of every 100 citizens is now incarcerated, criminal justice advocates are scrutinizing the way in which police and prosecutors go about getting the information to pursue and prosecute suspects. This inquiry has increasingly focused on the extent to which incentivized informants and jailhouse snitches are contributing to the convictions of innocent people.

A cursory review of the Jones case would be enough to suggest something is wrong. But a thousand Levon Jones stories don't elicit the same amount of outcry as one Kathryn Johnston case does.

In November 2006, Atlanta police gunned down Johnston—an elderly Atlanta grandmother—inside her home. The officers, who were from the city's narcotics task force, claimed to be acting on information they received from a confidential informant that drugs were being sold from the house. That allegation turned out to be false.

The Johnston tragedy shined a spotlight on the cavalier use of informant information to obtain arrest and search warrants. The Justice Department launched a federal probe and, nine months after the shooting, in July 2007, the House Committee on the Judiciary held a hearing on law enforcement's use of confidential informants.

"We've got a serious problem here that goes beyond coughing up cases where

snitches were helpful," said committee chair Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) at the hearing. "The whole criminal justice system is being intimidated by the way this thing is being run, and, in many cases, especially at the local level, mishandled. ... A lot of people have died because of misinformation."

It isn't known if any of those people have

## Since 1973, 129 innocent people were released from death row—more than 50 of whom were sentenced to death based partly or wholly on false informant testimony.

died at the hands of the state; but judging by some of the relevant corollary statistics, it's plausible that some have.

Falsified informant testimony accounts for nearly half of all wrongful convictions in capital cases nationwide, according to data from Northwestern University Law School's Center on Wrongful Convictions. Since 1973, 129 innocent people were released from death row—more than 50 of whom were sentenced to death based partly or wholly on false informant testimony, according to the Center.

Alexandra Natapoff, an associate professor of law at Loyola University and one of the country's foremost authorities on the problems with paid informants, thinks that's just the tip of the iceberg.

"We have the most data on capital and homicide convictions because they are the most high profile," she says, "so we have no idea how many wrongful convictions there are in larceny cases or assault cases or any other because nobody is paying any attention to those."

Natapoff has written extensively on the role of snitch testimony in wrongful convictions and says that informants have become law enforcement's investigative tool of choice.

"The government's use of criminal informants is largely secretive, unregulated and unaccountable," she says. "This lack of oversight and quality control leads to wrongful convictions, more crime, disrespect for the law and sometimes even official corruption."

She continues: "If the criminal system can't get homicide cases right, then it's very unlikely that we're getting other things right."

### A broken system

With the expansion of the "war on drugs" during the crack epidemic of the late 1980s, police began to abandon tradi-

tional investigative work in favor of insider cooperation. Cops say it's almost impossible to make a drug case any other way. But critics say the practice has led to a "dumbing down" of police work across the board.

"The drug war has eroded law enforcement practices," says investigative reporter Ethan Brown, whose recently published book, *Snitch: Informants, Cooperators and the Corruption of Justice*, traces the genesis of the informant culture and its effect on communities.

Those who study the snitch culture trace the problem to a criminal justice policy that has created the perfect atmosphere for what Brown calls the "cooperator institution" to thrive.

Most notably, Brown says, federal sentencing guidelines, adopted in 1987, have exacerbated the growth of the cooperator institution over the past two decades. Until a 2005 Supreme Court ruling gave judges more flexibility in sentencing, the guidelines made cooperating with authorities the only real option for defendants seeking leniency.

"Those guidelines really forced drug defendants into cooperating," says Brown. "Very few people will look at that kind of prison time and not cooperate."

But over the years, a practice once confined mainly to drug investigations has become standard operating procedure for the prosecution of all kinds of crime.

The reasons are myriad, but the simple matter of resources looms large. In a system severely taxed by an unwinnable

# MORE CASES OF INNOCENCE



**NAME** John Ballard  
**STATE** Florida  
**RACE** White  
**CONVICTED** 2003  
**EXONERATED** 2006  
**REASON** Acquitted



**NAME** Jonathon Hoffman  
**STATE** North Carolina  
**RACE** Black  
**CONVICTED** 1995  
**EXONERATED** 2007  
**REASON** Charges Dismissed



**NAME** Curtis McCarty  
**STATE** Oklahoma  
**RACE** White  
**CONVICTED** 1986  
**EXONERATED** 2007  
**REASON** Charges Dismissed  
**DNA** Yes

drug war, relying on informants is a cheap and easy investigative option. It can cost thousands of dollars to house, feed and protect an actual witness until trial, and, depending upon the offense and the defendant, such protection can carry on for years after conviction. By contrast, criminal informants are often compensated with leniency or are paid small sums, and often simply released into the same streets from which they came.

"It's all about this staggering misallocation of resources," says Brown. "We have this incredible institution for co-operators and informants, yet, for the kind of cooperating we need the most, there are really no resources."

This mutually beneficial relationship between police officers and their informants is what Natapoff calls "a disturbing marriage of convenience."

Prosecutors and police know the pitfalls, but in many cases write them off as the cost of doing business and making cases.

In a 1999 study published in the *Fordham Law Review*, Ellen Yaroshefsky, a law professor from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, interviewed a number of assistant U.S. attorneys from the Southern District of New York and found that while most said they made every effort to be diligent in assessing the veracity of informants, they admitted it's easy to get in too deep and lose objectivity.

In her study, Yaroshefsky described this as "fall[ing] in love with their rat."

"You're not supposed to, of course. You are trained to maintain your objectivity," an anonymous participant in Yaroshefsky's study said. "But you spend time with this guy, you get to know him and his family, you like him. You believe that he has come clean. Hopefully the assistant has a skeptical mindset, but the reality is that the cooperator's information often becomes your mindset."

Still, other times investigators are already working under an assumption of guilt and are simply seeking confirmation.

"[Sometimes] prosecutors are convinced they have the guilty guy, then they go about seeking to convict and do not carefully look at things that are funny

about their case," one of Yaroshefsky's sources said.

Former prosecutor and now Howard University law professor Andrew Taslitz says that when he started out in the Philadelphia district attorney's office, his youth and ambition often clouded his judgment when it came to reliance on informants who had received incentives. He says he thinks his experience is the norm.

"Most prosecutors are very, very young, especially at the state level," Taslitz says. "They're new graduates of law school or they've done some other job for a few years but they're mostly in their late 20s, early 30s tops, with very little experience. It's one of the reasons that office policies that just tell them what to do are so important."

Another problem is that many of the assumptions that courts make about how witness testimony is received simply don't pan out.

The Supreme Court established the constitutional basis for using paid informants in 1966 with *U.S. v. Hoffa*, which decided that rewarding a witness for testimony does not violate due process. In its opinion, the court wrote: "The established safeguards of the Anglo-American legal system leave the veracity of a witness to be tested by cross examination, and the credibility of his testimony to be determined by a properly instructed jury."

But Natapoff says, in practice, those mechanisms are deeply ineffective at protecting defendants from lying informants.

"Let's say the government does disclose [compensation] and the jury knows about it," she says. "You would think, and the Supreme Court certainly thinks, that that will make a difference. Well, psychological research has found that it makes almost no difference, that jurors ignore the fact that the witness is compensated."

And that's only for the cases that go to trial. Because 95 percent of criminal cases are resolved through plea agreements, defendants rarely get the chance to challenge an informant's story or credibility.

"The Supreme Court has held that while defendants who go to trial are entitled to impeachment material about their

# MORE CASES OF INNOCENCE

informants, defendants who plead guilty are not," Natapoff says. "So that means that most defendants will never see the deal that the informant got."

In spite of all the potential pitfalls, police and prosecutors say the benefits of informants outweigh the potential for abuse.

Ronald E. Brooks, president of the National Narcotic Officers' Associations' Coalition, calls informants "indispensable investigative assets" and cautions against issuing a blanket judgment on the use of confidential informants by police officers for "a few instances of mismanagement or wrongdoing."

"When we appropriately manage informants, great cases, ones that make our community safe are the result," he says. "When informants are improperly used, the results can be devastating. But without the ability to freely use informants, law enforcement would have very few significant investigative successes."

## A call for reform

Since the 2007 House Judiciary Committee hearing in the wake of the death of Kathryn Johnston, little headway has been made in reforming the practice of using incentivized informants to send people to jail—and, possibly, execution.

According to the American Bar Association (ABA), 18 states now require corroboration of an accomplice's statements. Those that require corroboration for other forms of incentivized witnesses, however, are few and far between.

Illinois currently mandates corroboration in capital cases, and courts in Nebraska and Oklahoma have required corroboration for jailhouse snitches. Texas, meanwhile, has a different requirement, not for jailhouse snitches, but for undercover drug operatives working for the police.

Criminal justice reformers say they want to make sure police and prosecutors are following protocol in how and when they use paid or incentivized informants.

Taslitz, who serves in the ABA's Criminal Justice Section, says more transparency is needed during the discovery phase. For example, he'd like to see defendants who are negotiating a plea agreement have access to the information and witnesses being used against them.

In a 2005 ABA resolution that Taslitz helped write, the association urged federal, state and local authorities to require that informants meet certain standards of credibility and that courts mandate corroboration in all cases that involve jailhouse snitches.

But so far there has been little in the way of reform.

"It's a slow process," Taslitz says, "and it doesn't have to necessarily be a matter of legislation, but it could be a matter of individual prosecutors' offices adopting specific policies; it can be a matter of local ordinances; it can be case law where judges start to intervene. It's a slow process and, as of yet, there is no uniform informants act."

For cases that do go to trial, Natapoff has been pushing for "pre-trial reliability hearings" as a potential remedy. Under such a system, the burden would be on the government to prove witness reliability by a preponderance of evidence. Courts would be required to consider such factors as the criminal history of the informant, any compensation for their testimony, and other cases in which the informant has testified, among other things.

"Given the prevalence of informant falsehoods in wrongful capital convictions, such hearings should be mandatory in capital cases, even where the defense intends to concede guilt and move directly to the sentencing phase," Natapoff says.

Considering that for every innocent person convicted of murder, a *real* murderer escapes justice, requiring such checks and balances is as much a victim's rights issue as a matter of criminal justice.

For his part, in spite of losing a decade and a half of his life, Levon Jones says he holds no grudge against the snitch that put him on death row.

Rather, he attributes his ordeal to a miscarriage of justice.

Says Jones: "It was the system itself." ■

**CHRISTOPHER MORAFF** is a frequent contributor to *In These Times*, the *American Prospect* Online and *Common Sense*. He is also the associate editor of the financial magazine, the *Monitor*, where he specializes in covering corporate fraud.



**NAME** Michael McCormick  
**STATE** Tennessee  
**RACE** White  
**CONVICTED** 1987  
**EXONERATED** 2007  
**REASON** Acquitted



**NAME** Glen Chapman  
**STATE** North Carolina  
**RACE** Black  
**CONVICTED** 1994  
**EXONERATED** 2008  
**REASON** Charges Dismissed



**NAME** Kennedy Brewer  
**STATE** Mississippi  
**RACE** Black  
**CONVICTED** 1995  
**EXONERATED** 2008  
**REASON** Charges Dismissed  
**DNA** Yes

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# Life After Foster Care

Even with extended benefits, foster children face daunting challenges

BY SARA PECK



Foster children Marshawn (right) and Maleek hug a new puppy in New York City.

CHRIS HONDROS/GETTY IMAGES

**S**HANTAYE WONZER CAN'T REALLY remember being anything but a foster kid. In the past 18 years, she's moved more than 15 times, been abandoned by her adoptive parents and lived in two group homes. Yet this September, on her 21st birthday, she says her life will become even more difficult. Wonzer will no longer be a ward of the state, and will have to forfeit all services and support that she has until now received.

"The hardest part will be knowing that I won't have anywhere to turn to for help," says Wonzer, a junior at Bradley University in Peoria, Ill. "I've been able to build up a network around me, but it

still doesn't change the fact that I'm losing the closest thing that I have had to a parent for the last 18 years."

Until 2007, Illinois' foster children were emancipated at age 18, moving them from sheltered home life to complete independence. Illinois was the first state to extend emancipation to age 21, and Vermont is the only other state to use state money to extend services to age 21, if a youth chooses to remain in the program. (A bill proposed by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) in May 2007 would provide federal funding to allow kids nationwide to stay in care longer, but the bill is still in its infancy.)

Kendall Marlowe, deputy director of communications for the Illinois Depart-

ment of Child and Family Services, says extending care would not necessarily alleviate the difficulties faced by foster youths who "age out" at 21.

"No matter how good the system gets, all foster children will hit that fateful day without family connections," he says. "People say that there are holes in the system and that kids fall through, but I know better than they do that that's the truth. Kids in foster care have so many more challenges."

But an extra three years is by no means an ideal situation for many youths whose inevitable emancipation without much state assistance is merely delayed.

Amy Dworsky, a lead researcher at the Chicago-based Chapin Hall Center for

Children, a research institute affiliated with the University of Chicago, says that because Illinois extends care past age 18, teens are given fewer services after they leave care compared with other states.

Since 2002, Dworsky has been following more than 700 foster care youth in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin as they leave foster care and transition into independent living.

"But because [kids can remain in care until 21], there's certainly a gap in the after-services provided," she says.

Job search services, Medicaid coverage and housing programs are often unavailable to emancipated foster youth. Only 40 percent of the foster youths Dworsky studied held a job, 40 percent said they did not have enough money to buy clothing and 34 percent had been arrested.

Only 46 percent of young adults surveyed by Chapin Hall said they had savings accounts, compared with 82 percent of youths not in foster care. These economic hardships leave most of them uninsured, Dworsky says.

"When they leave the system, they lose their Medicaid coverage and, as a result, they lose access to medical and mental healthcare that they need," says Dworsky, who points out that Illinois has not extended medical coverage to age 21. Shortly after she released the study's findings, Wisconsin included Medicaid for emancipated foster youths in its upcoming budget.

In Wisconsin, 80 percent of foster kids stay in fewer than two homes, compared to 50 percent of Illinois' foster children. The average stint in foster care for Iowa's children is only 18 months.

Both Iowa and Wisconsin have significantly higher reunification rates than Illinois, where only about 40 percent of state wards are returned to their biological parents. What's more, the number of abused youths in Illinois is nearly double that of Iowa and Wisconsin combined.

At Our Children's Homestead (OCH) in Naperville, Ill., which specializes in placing mentally and emotionally disabled foster teens, 90 percent of kids are on psychotropic medication for bipolar disorder, depression or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Duncan Ward, a caseworker at OCH,

says most of the youths he works with have been in at least 10 foster homes and need additional services and support. He says most of his cases are like 16-year-old Billy, who was born addicted to crack cocaine and has attempted suicide four times in the past year. Billy is currently at the Chicago Lakeshore Hospital after being kicked out of his 12th foster home. [Ed.

**'I worked with a 21-year-old kid who said that he thought he'd be better off in jail. That's pretty shocking. The girls are luckier since they usually have babies and can go on welfare.'**

Note: "Billy" is a pseudonym.]

"We're dealing with severely damaged kids," Ward says. "We need people who are willing to work 110 percent to help them, and that's hard to come by."

Once emancipated, the more than 50 percent of uninsured OCH teens could apply for public assistance money, Ward says, but most do not.

"They look at insurance as another bill, so they don't follow up on it," he says. "My kids have said they feel like being on medication is embarrassing, so they don't want to do it. They just aren't ready to juggle a job, bills and responsibilities."

Gaps in education, medical care and emotional support often predispose foster kids for "almost every social ill imaginable," says Marlowe of Illinois' Department of Child and Family Services.

In 2007, the National Association of Social Workers found that, nationwide, 80 percent of state prison inmates had been through the foster care system.

"I worked with a 21-year-old kid who said that he thought he'd be better off in jail," says Joe Roszkowski, a clinical psychologist at OCH. "That's pretty shocking. The girls are luckier since they usually have babies and can go on welfare."

Services aren't the only shortage. Finding homes for children, especially those with special needs, is also a struggle.

"We're really badly in need of foster homes," says Marissa Allen, vice president of child welfare services at OCH. "But it's difficult because nobody wants

to take a hostile 16-year-old with special needs; typical teens are hard enough."

Nonprofit and community-based organizations like OCH handle 70 percent to 80 percent of child placements, Marlowe says.

Though the number of children in foster homes has fallen 69 percent since 1997 due to a statewide push toward

adoption, Allen says OCH received a large number of kids from failed adoptions filed during this period.

The shortage continues to harm children as they bounce between homes or are left in abusive environments.

Katie Belleville, 20, of Glenview, Ill., fought to leave her abusive parents for five years before turning 18 and gaining legal independence.

"(The police) just kept sending me back to an abusive environment," she says. "They told me that no one was going to want to foster an 18-year-old."

But some people do. Charlotte Crawford, 44, has fostered more than 23 children in the past 19 years in her Crest Hill, Ill., home. She's worked with severely disabled children, including one teenage boy who ran away to Indiana almost daily, and a girl who underwent brain surgery.

Crawford says her three biological children—two daughters and one son—have benefited from growing up surrounded by special-needs foster children. When Crawford's youngest daughter was a toddler, two 16-year-old boys with special needs were living with them. Crawford recalled how the boys tried to teach her how to walk.

"You would have thought that they were little old men running around after her, making sure they she didn't fall," she says. "It's amazing to see how these hardened kids can really care for younger children and change." ■



# Is the Fourth Estate a Fifth Column?

**Corporate media colludes with democracy's demise**

BY BILL MOYERS

I heard this story a long time ago, growing up in Choctaw County in Oklahoma before my family moved to Texas. A tribal elder was telling his grandson about the battle the old man was waging within himself. He said, "It is between two wolves, my son. One is an evil wolf: anger, envy, sorrow, greed, self-pity, guilt, resentment, lies, false pride, superiority and ego. The other is the good wolf: joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."

The boy took this in for a few minutes and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf won?"

The old Cherokee replied simply, "The one I feed."

Democracy is that way. The wolf that wins is the one we feed. And in our society, media provides the fodder.

Our media institutions, deeply embedded in the power structures of society, are not providing the information that we need to make our democracy work. To put it another way, corporate media consolidation is a corrosive social force. It robs people of their voice in public affairs and pollutes the political culture. And it turns the debates about profound issues into a shouting match of polarized views promulgated by partisan apologists



who trivialize democracy while refusing to speak the truth about how our country is being plundered.

Our dominant media are ultimately accountable only to corporate boards whose mission is not life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for the whole body of our republic, but the aggrandizement of corporate executives and shareholders.

These organizations' self-styled mandate is not to hold public and private power accountable, but to aggregate their interlocking interests. Their reward is not to help fulfill the social compact embodied in the notion of "We, the people," but to manufacture news and information as profitable consumer commodities.

Democracy without honest information creates the illusion of popular consent at the same time that it enhances the power of the state and the privileged interests that the state protects. And nothing characterizes corporate media today more than its disdain toward the fragile nature of modern life and its indifference toward the complex social debate required of a free and self-governing people.

Let's look at what is happening with the Internet. This spring the cable giant Comcast tried to pack a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) hearing on network neutrality by hiring strangers off the street to ensure that advocates of net neutrality would not be able to get a seat in the hearing room.

SaveTheInternet.com—a bipartisan coalition—and its supporters helped expose the ruse. Soon after, there was a new hearing, this time without the gerrymandering seating by opponents of an open Internet.

Now Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) has introduced a bill to advance network neutrality, and it has become an issue in the presidential campaign.

We must be vigilant. The fate of the cyber-commons—the future of the mobile Web and the benefits of the Internet as open architecture—is up for grabs. And the only antidote to the power of organized money in Washington is the power of organized people at the net roots.

When Verizon tried to censor NARAL's (National Abortion Rights Action League) use of text messaging last year, it was quick action by Save the Internet that led

the company to reverse its position. Those efforts also led to an FCC proceeding on this issue.

Wherever the Internet flows—on PCs, cell phones, mobile devices and, very soon, new digital television sets—we must ensure that it remains an open and nondiscriminatory medium of expression.

By 2011, the market analysts tell us,

## **Without a free and independent press, this 250-year-old experiment in self-government will not make it. As journalism goes, so goes democracy.**

the Internet will surpass newspapers in advertising revenues. With MySpace and Dow Jones controlled by News Corporation's Rupert Murdoch, Microsoft determined to acquire Yahoo!, and with advertisers already telling some bloggers, "Your content is unacceptable," we could potentially lose what's now considered an unstoppable long tail of content offering abundant, new, credible and sustainable sources of news and information.

So, what will happen to news in the future, as the already tattered boundaries between journalism and advertising is dispensed with entirely and as content programming, commerce and online communities are rolled into one profitably attractive package?

Last year, the investment firm of Piper Jaffray predicted that much of the business model for new media would be just that kind of hybrid. They called it "communitainment." (Oh, George Orwell, where are you now that we need you?)

**A**CROSS THE MEDIA landscape, the health of our democracy is imperiled. Buffeted by gale force winds of technological, political and demographic forces, without a truly free and independent press, this 250-year-old experiment in self-government will not make it. As journalism goes, so goes democracy.

Mergers and buyouts change both old and new media. They bring a frenzied focus on cost-cutting, while fattening the pockets of the new owners and their investors. The result: journalism is degraded through the layoffs and buyouts

of legions of reporters and editors.

*Advertising Age* reports that U.S. media employment has fallen to a 15-year low. The *Los Angeles Times* alone has experienced a withering series of resignations by editors who refused to turn a red pencil into an editorial scalpel.

The new owner of the Tribune Company, real estate mogul Sam Zell, recently

toured his new property *Los Angeles Times*, telling employees in the newsroom that the challenge is this: How do we get somebody 126 years old to get it up? "Well," said Zell, "I'm your Viagra."

He told his journalists that he didn't have an editorial agenda or a perspective about newspapers' roles as civic institutions. "I'm a businessman," he said. "All what matters in the end is the bottom line."

Zell then told Wall Street analysts that to save money he intends to eliminate 500 pages of news a week across all of the Tribune Company's 12 papers. That can mean eliminating some 82 editorial pages every week just from the *Los Angeles Times*. What will he use to replace reporters and editors? He says to the Wall Street analysts, "I'll use maps, graphics, lists, rankings and stats." Sounds as if Zell has confused Viagra with Lunesta.

Former *Baltimore Sun* journalist and creator of HBO's *The Wire*, David Simon, chronicled the effect that crosscutting and consolidation has had in media businesses and on the communities where those businesses have made so much money. He wrote in a *Washington Post* op-ed, "I did not encounter a sustained period in which anyone endeavored to spend what it would actually cost to make the *Baltimore Sun* the most essential and deep-thinking and well-written account of life in central Maryland. The people you needed to gather for that kind of storytelling were ushered out the door, buyout after buyout."

Or as journalist Eric Alterman recently wrote in the *New Yorker*: "It is impossible not to wonder what will become of

not just news but democracy itself, in a world in which we can no longer depend on newspapers to invest their unmatched resources and professional pride in helping the rest of us to learn, however imperfectly, what we need to know.”

supporting an unprovoked war on another country. And it did so using erroneous and misleading intelligence—and with the complicity of the dominant media. It has led to a conflict that, instead of being over quickly and bloodlessly as predicted, con-

tinues every day. It’s that they don’t allow other alternative competing narratives to emerge, against which the people could measure the veracity of all the claims.

Now the dominant media is saying, “Well, we did ask. We did do our job by asking tough questions during the run-up to the war.”

But I’ve been through the transcripts. And I’ll tell you, you will find very few tough questions. And if you come across them, you will discover that they were asked of the wrong people.

John Walcott, Washington bureau chief for McClatchy, formerly Knight Ridder, recently said of his colleagues in the dominant media, “They asked a lot of questions, but they asked even the right questions of the wrong people.” They were asked of the sources who had cooked the intelligence books in the first place or who had memorized the White House talking points and were prepared to answer every tough question with a soft evasion or an easy lie, swallowed by a gullible questioner.

Following the March 2003 invasion, Vice President Dick Cheney dropped into a media dinner to thank the guests for their all-the-war-all-the-time coverage of the contrived and manufactured war.

Sadly, in many respects, the Fourth Estate has become the fifth column of democracy, colluding with the powers that be in a culture of deception that subverts the thing most necessary to freedom, and that is the truth.

But we’re not alone and we know what we need to say. So let us all go tell it on the mountains and in the cities. From our websites and laptops, the street corners and coffeehouses, the delis and diners, the factory floors and the bookstores. On campus, at the mall, the synagogue, sanctuary and mosque, let’s tell it where we can, when we can and while we still can.

Democracy only works when ordinary people claim it as their own. ■

*This article was adapted from Bill Moyers’ keynote address at the National Conference for Media Reform Conference in Minneapolis on June 7. You can read and respond to the full speech at [www.pbs.org/moyers](http://www.pbs.org/moyers).*

## The Fourth Estate has become the fifth column of democracy, colluding with the powers that be in a culture of deception that subverts the thing most necessary to freedom, and that is the truth.

**F**OR EXAMPLE, WE needed to know the truth about Iraq. The truth could have spared that country from rack and ruin, saved thousands of American lives and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives, and freed hundreds of billions of dollars for investment in the American economy and infrastructure.

But as reporters at Knight Ridder—one of the few organizations that systematically and independently set out to challenge the claims of the administration—told us at the time, and as my colleagues and I reported in our PBS documentary *Buying the War*, and as Scott McClellan has now confessed, and as the Senate Intelligence Committee confirmed in June, the Bush administration deceived Americans into

continues to this day into its sixth year.

We now know that a neoconservative is an arsonist who sets a house on fire and six years later boasts that no one can put it out. You couldn’t find a more revealing measure of the state of the dominant media today than the continuing ubiquitous presence on the air and in print of the very pundits and experts, self-selected message multipliers of a disastrous foreign policy, who got it all wrong in the first place. It just goes to show, when the bar is low enough, you can never be too wrong.

The dominant media remains in denial about their role in passing on the government’s unverified claims as facts. That’s the great danger. It’s not simply that they dominate the story we tell ourselves pub-

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# In Defense of the '60s

The pursuit of happiness is a dream for all generations

BY PETER MARCUSE



On May 6, 1968, students battled police in the Rue Saint-Jacques in Paris.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

**T**HE PROTESTS OF 1968—SYMBOLICALLY, the occupation of the Columbia University buildings, the student uprisings in Paris and the street protests in Berlin—are now in danger of being denigrated as the actions of spoiled, confused, if not neurotic, students and rebellious youth who were “finding” themselves in making trivial demands of their uncomprehending and benevolent societies.

An April 23 op-ed by Paul Auster in the *New York Times* calls 1968 “the year of the crazies.” Another op-ed, by Jean-Claude Guillebaud, on May 24, calls the protesters “useful idiots,” and the current attention on them a “frenzy of nostalgia.”

In the process, the serious changes brought about by the events of '68, the substance of the protests, the reasons for the discontent, and the desire for change, are either ignored or superciliously dismissed as childish daydreams.

Even Slavoj Žižek in the July issue of *In These Times* quotes with approval French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's comment about the students of '68: “As revolutionaries, you are hysterics who demand a new master. You will get one.”

That much was, in fact, achieved is beyond doubt.

The Columbia protests stopped both military research at the university and the construction of a gym in a park that was seen by Harlem and its black residents as

an insult by a rich, dominant institution.

Internationally, the '68 protests changed the character of post-war politics, helped end the Vietnam War, and legitimized concerns about peace, welfare and democracy beyond the prevailing mainstream consensus.

Underlying the student protests was a deep dissatisfaction with things as they were: the acceptance of violence, the discrimination, the consumerism, the competitive pursuit of wealth and power, the false virility, the hypocritical sexual mores, the environmental degradation, the commercialization of art and imagination, the production of one-dimensional people. The desire for love as a central component of life—love both in its erotic and in its



humane sense, brotherly and sisterly love among all people—was a powerful motivating force.

But the nature of the dissatisfactions and the aspirations behind them deserve a closer examination.

Surprisingly, those aspirations for a just and humane society are not far from those on which the United States and the French revolutions were based more than two centuries ago: “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” and “liberty, equality, fraternity.” These claims have run through the history of the modern world, and have been the sources of major protests against the three great social evils of exploitation, domination and discrimination.

**I**N THE AMERICAN Revolution, “life” meant the satisfaction of material needs. That’s what motivated the Boston of Sam Adams and what roused, in the spirit of equality, the colonial farmer.

“Liberty” in the United States meant freedom from domination from abroad, and in France meant freedom from an entrenched feudal system.

“Fraternity”—later “sorority,” or better yet, “solidarity”—spoke to relations between people, not simply formal justice but also human relations. It was this claim of fraternity, coupled with a belief in equality, that lay behind the slave rebellions, the Civil War and later the civil rights movement, in which the exploitation and domination that racism supported were necessarily also targets of the struggle.

“The pursuit of happiness,” however, added something different. “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is Thomas Jefferson’s modification of philosopher John Locke’s phrase “life, liberty and property”—a solidly liberal and now conventional formulation.

It is stretching a point to think that in writing “the pursuit of happiness,” Jefferson might have had in mind the claims of the ’60s protesters. But while the connection may be more logical than historical, it is nonetheless symbolically provocative.

The ’60s did add a new ingredient to the conventional liberal demands of the earlier centuries—claims made possible by technological promises of plenty and prosperity that were based on a system in which

exploitation, domination and racism were concealed but nevertheless central.

The ’68 movement targeted the one-dimensionality that was the result of a system in which profit was derived from never-ending competition and never-ending growth.

The protesters thought there was hope for revolutionary change because this system contains the means for its own undoing: It produces technologies that enable the fulfillment of authentic human needs to an extent never before possible—and without the necessity of manufacturing inauthentic needs for material consumption to keep the system going.

With this new awareness, new demands were expressed in action. (Historically, those aspirations were not new; the Lawrence textile strikers in Massachusetts put “Bread and Roses” on their placards in 1912.) These new claims took seriously the “pursuit of happiness” both as a social goal and as a personal one. They were the foundations of the ’60s protests.

The earlier claims were included: the right to equality in opposition to discrimination was successfully addressed with broad civil rights legislation and political reform. The acceptance of more widespread democratic participation in politics extended liberty. And opposition to domination ended the Vietnam War under the claim for justice and liberty.

Separately, these were each major reforms. They came together as anti-colonial revolutions in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

**T**HE STUDENTS OCCUPYING Columbia University buildings—protesting a university gym preempting a public park, accepting the leadership of African-American youth, and opposing the use of university resources for research into technologies of death—symbolized the earlier and the new sensibility.

The students were deeply disturbed at the difficulties of providing an adequate material life, in the face of the reality of increasing inequality in the distribution of goods and services. But they added to that a demand to expand the possibilities for the pursuit of happiness, both as individuals and collectively, although

the claim was often rather inchoate, and expressed more theoretically and philosophically than politically.

So, no political revolutions resulted from the actions of the demonstrators in the streets of Berlin, New York and Paris—or in Detroit, Los Angeles and Montgomery. Major reforms, yes, but the idealistic aspirations were abortive.

They responded to the one-dimensionality of the world around them, and linked their dissatisfaction to the antiwar and civil rights movements, but not politically to the third source of protest—exploitation.

Symptomatic of this was the attitude of the police in the Columbia buildings occupation. They treated the students as elitist brats enjoying the luxuries of an expensive education that a working policeman could never aspire to. The common nexus that connected the students’ aspirations for freedom and happiness to the limits on material opportunities of exploited workers did not come together.

In France, workers were directly engaged, but the bulk of the trade union leadership withheld support from the broader aspirations, refusing to see connections where doing so would have interfered with more pragmatic considerations.

In May 1968, a columnist for *Le Nouvel Observateur* wrote of Paris:

It was the strike, not the student revolt, that truly paralyzed the country for three long weeks. The paradox is that these two movements never encountered each other. The students marching toward the factories to “meet the workers” found the doors closed. The unions didn’t want them: the workers found the students disorganized and irresponsible.

The New Left tried to put all claims together and in context, but in the end failed. The system was too strong, was able to deliver the goods to meet ever-increasing, artificially created needs and consumerist desires, and provided enough satisfaction to thwart the emergence of even deeper demands. The reforms that were achieved were limited not by the weakness of the students and the protesters of the ’60s, but by the strength of the system that they critically engaged.

By 1968, the advances that a technologically oriented industrial society had

opened up were, in a technical sense, revolutionary. They created a possibility of a world without want, a world in which necessary uncreative labor was reduced to a bare minimum, in which restraints on liberty and blocks to fraternity were no longer required for growth, in which there was no need to repress love that might interfere with economically more desirable motivations—a world in which, in a manner of speaking, utopias were no longer utopian but were technically feasible.

Realizing this, as many of the protests of '68 did, put the possibility of meeting new claims—such as for the achievement of happiness—on the historical agenda, and on the global stage.

For the first time in history, the possibility of achieving the full goals of the 18th century revolution existed, and the students and protesters of '68 were the first to raise it in the arena of political and social action.

However, the formulation of these new demands ignored one simple thing: the system—which had delivered the goods to many of the students and their supporters, enabling them to formulate these newly realizable aspirations—had not delivered the goods in like manner to everyone.

Many workers, the unemployed and poorly paid, members of ethnic or racial minorities, and many women were excluded from the benefits of the new abundance, as were huge numbers in the Third World. Their struggles were for the minimal level of equality that would let them participate in the acquisition of the goods being delivered to others. Žižek, writing in *In These Times*, calls them the Excluded, differentiating them from the Included, such as the students and many of those on the New Left.

As a consequence, a conflict appeared between the demands of the '68 protesters and the large number of those whose demands could be seen as a prerequisite for pursuing the claims of the new sensibility. In other words, a disconnect occurred between the needs of the Included and the needs of the Excluded.

That disconnect was little addressed in theory, and it perhaps prevented the ferment of the '60s from achieving either side's goals.

But there were glimmers of a realization of the problem: in the calls of the civil rights movement not only for full participation in the existing system but also for reform of that system as in the calls of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at the end of his life:

We have moved into an era where we are called upon to raise certain basic questions

## For the first time in history, the possibility of achieving the goals of the 18th century revolution existed, and the protesters of '68 were the first to raise it in the arena of political and social action.

about the whole society. We are still called upon to give aid to the beggar who finds himself in misery and agony on life's highway. But one day, we must ask the question of whether an edifice which produces beggars must not be restructured and refurbished. That is where we are now. (Speech to the leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Frogmore, May 1967.)

When Žižek stresses the importance of “the destructured masses” and attention to “the Excluded,” but criticizes the French suburban riots of 2005 as “an outburst with no pretense to vision,” he is right. But the lesson that needs to be drawn is to forge the link between the resistant members of the Included—the students and intellectuals of '68 and their successors today—and the Excluded—the exploited workers of the majority of the world, including the French suburban rioters in 2005 and of African Americans and Latinos of the United States. But the unification of the two is not easy in practice.

**W**E HAVE SEEN a perverse reflection of the failure to unite the sources of protest in the current election campaign. In caricature, Sen. Hillary Clinton's (D-N.Y.) primary campaign drew on the demand for sorority, and Sen. Barack Obama's (D-Ill.) on that for racial equality. Both campaigns dealt, with various levels of directness, with the exploitation of workers.

But Obama also draws on another sensibility—that greed is dehumanizing, that broader changes in human relations and

conduct are needed, that there is something missing in everyday life that goes beyond a mere paycheck and a middle-class standard of living. Perhaps calling it a real chance at the pursuit of happiness is too rhetorical, but that is what it harkens back to.

Clinton tried to convince voters that this was elitist, of interest only to the Included, and she tried to convince those

who endure exploitation—whose daily lives are insecure, whose needs and anxieties are day-to-day, who may in fact really be bitter, the Excluded—that Obama and his greater vision come at the expense of neglecting their immediate crises.

Former White House adviser Karl Rove saw the difference in similar, if cruder, terms. He wrote in the May 16 *Wall Street Journal*: “The primary has created a deep fissure in Democratic ranks: blue collar, less affluent, less educated voters versus the white-wine crowd of academics and upscale professionals (along with blacks and young people).”

In diluted form, this is precisely the problem that 1968 raised for the first time in efforts for major social change in the United States: on the one hand, the connection between the immediate needs of those still struggling for the basics, and, on the other hand, the hopes for a fuller, richer life that others, largely better positioned, want to pursue.

The two together constitute a call to implement the “inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” that the Declaration of Independence claimed more than 200 years ago, that the idealistic protesters of 1968 were after, and that Obama must succeed in unifying if he is to advance the change he is talking about.

It is a set of goals still well worth fighting for. And we should honor the activists of 1968 for their contributions to it, not dismissively denigrate them. ■

BY GEORGE KENNEY

## All Guns, No Butter

Now retired, Thomas P. Christie has served the U.S. government as an influential military analyst and manager. After holding senior positions at the Pentagon on and off from 1973, Christie worked as director of Operational Test and Evaluation from 2001-2005, the Pentagon's chief

weapons tester, the highest ranking civil service appointment in the Pentagon. Though largely unknown outside the Pentagon, Christie was a key figure in some of the biggest battles over military spending in recent years.

He regularly disproved contractors' claims about new weapons systems, though some of the most unnecessary have continued to be developed nonetheless. A master bureaucrat, tall, white-haired, soft-spoken, Christie rose through the ranks, providing leadership and institutional cover for an informal group of like-minded individuals concerned with Pentagon deficiencies across the board, from tactics and strategy to technology and economics.

More vocal than ever in retirement, Christie's insights remain essential to discussions about how to control breakaway military spending.

**The Pentagon spends enormously. The Defense budget for fiscal year '09 is \$519 billion—\$129 billion for personnel, \$180 billion for operations and maintenance, \$104 billion for procurement, \$80 billion for research and development, \$24 billion for military construction and \$2 billion for management.**

But that doesn't come close to how much money eventually will be spent on the military. That doesn't include the [\$165 billion] supplemental [bill to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan]. So you're easily up to \$700 billion in this coming fis-

cal year. And a large part of the budget is over in the Department of Energy—all the nuclear stuff. The Veteran's Administration is carrying a burden associated with our veterans.

So I don't know how much is being spent. But a lot of that money is going into systems that Defense Secretary Bob Gates has criticized quite frankly—systems that were started and justified based on what was going on during the Cold War.

**What justifies spending more on military matters than the rest of the world combined?**

Take a look at what's in the budget in the context of modernization. The F-22 fighter plane is a classic example. That program goes back to the early to mid-'80s. At one time, the Air Force was going to buy 700. We're buying 180 now, and the Air Force wants to buy more.

And Secretary Gates' point is those systems aren't playing any role in the situations we're involved in—in Afghanistan and Iraq—nor will they.

So we are postulating now that the Chinese are the threat of the future, or peer competitors, or whatever we call them. We're grasping at straws in order to justify this amount of money. The stuff we're spending money on—some of the Navy ships, nuclear attack submarines or the F-22—can they really be justified when you look at the future and see a world that is going to be similar to what we have today?

You've got two things happening: First, everything we're developing and buying is costing an arm and a leg. And second, you're justifying it based on a questionable projected threat.

I really despair about getting a handle on this because it isn't just the Defense Department, it's also Congress. It's a military-industrial and congressional complex that is going full steam, and any attempt to draw back on that will be met with defeat, unfortunately. And I don't care which administration comes in. Once you've got all this stuff going down the pike, these big systems—they are jobs programs.

**Is it intellectually respectable to argue in favor of, say, a 50 percent cut in military spending? Can one defend that position?**

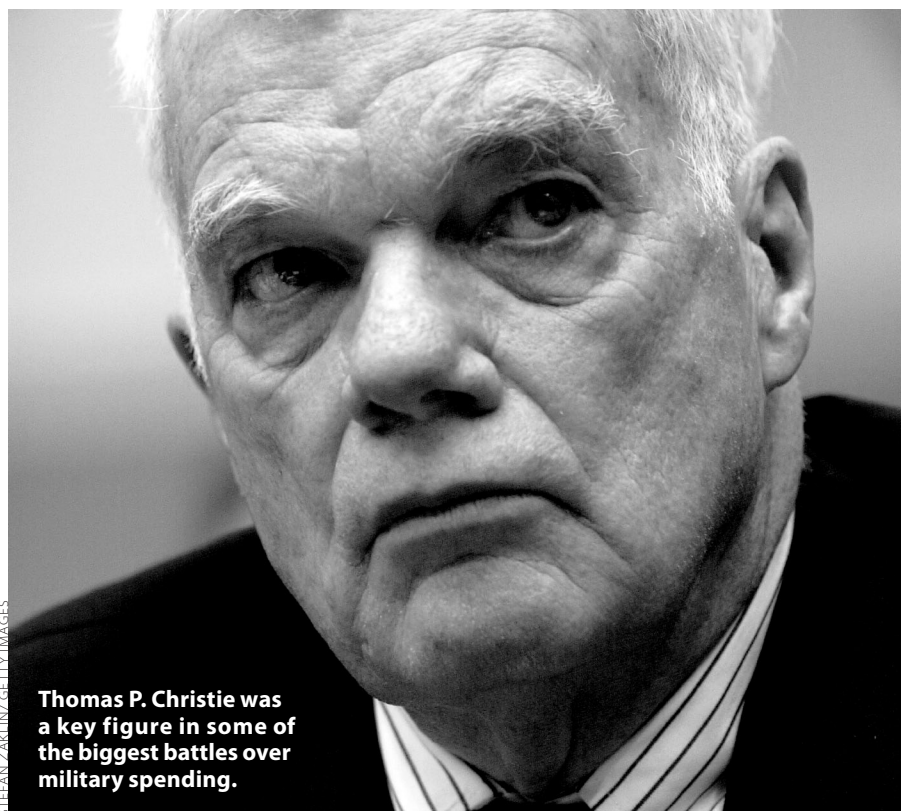
I think so. That would be doable. You're talking definitely about smaller forces. Of course, manpower, and the operating and support costs are what's eating our lunch today.

And the other thing that's interesting—tragic is more the word for it—is we don't know where the hell all this money is! We can't track where our money is going. And we've known this for 20 or 30 years. We've had Pentagon comptroller after comptroller say, "Okay, we're gonna get it fixed," and then they throw their arms up in despair.

We need to stop where we are, aside from continuing to do whatever we're doing in Iraq and Afghanistan, finish that off to the extent we can—just stop everything for a year or so until we get our finances into some shape.

We need to get a real independent group to look at where we should be going in the Defense Department in the future: What are the real threats? How should we structure our forces? What systems should we be looking to develop and buy? And then take a look at what we need in the way of the defense budget.





**Thomas P. Christie was a key figure in some of the biggest battles over military spending.**

Unfortunately, an arbitrary cut like 50 percent—even though I think you could rationalize it—certainly would never sell.

**The difference between U.S. spending and everybody else's is that other countries balance their priorities. They've got healthcare programs, education, infrastructure. If the military is soaking up all this wealth, there's nothing left over.**

You got it. The infrastructure of this country is in very sad shape. Part of the problem is the huge defense budget. Even with little or no spending on the infrastructure, we're still running up these huge deficits. You shake your head and wonder. Look at the health situation in this country. Something's got to be done there. We're paying no attention to it.

Two years ago, the country elected a different Congress. They've been in power for a year and a half now. What have they done differently?

**Not much.**

Not much! It's a stalemate.

**Are you optimistic that if Obama were elected, that he would be able to escape the influences of this military-industrial and congressional complex?**

No, I'm not optimistic. The Clinton administration came in and caused of a lot of the problems with this acquisition reform business. We cut way back on the people that oversaw acquisition programs, and it was like, "Let the contractor do his thing, and we'll accept what we got." We are still suffering from that regime.

When I was being interviewed by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to take the job that I did in 2001, Rumsfeld and his transition team were right on when they said, "We have got to get control of the military. We have got to exercise civilian control of the military. It's been totally absent during the previous administration." And that was true.

But we ended up still going off on a bunch of big modernization programs with little or no oversight. And we've had these monstrous cost overruns that have been coming to light for the last several years. Now we're faced with a lack of people who can competently look into what is being done in these development programs or the contractors and be able to see before the cost overruns or technical problems surface.

**Were cluster bombs and landmines weapons that you dealt with at all?**

Oh yeah. Particularly cluster weapons. You have what looks like a bomb that opens up and flings out 200 or 300 of baseball-sized bomblets. We flung them all over Bosnia and Kosovo and all over the desert. And when you're flinging out thousands of these things and you have less than 90 percent reliability, you've got a big problem. So, the world has reacted. And our military is just wedded to this stuff.

As far as landmines, that's a different situation, but it's similar. You've got this problem with civilians afterwards.

**We haven't acceded to the treaty on landmines. Is that right?**

That's true. We learned in Vietnam that they had these reliability problems all along, but we never stopped to think that once the conflict is over, then what? It's happened over and over. So the world is reacting. And I guess the United States recently tried to sabotage the deal in Dublin to ban cluster bombs.

**That's an agreement which we're not part of.**

And that makes us look bad.

**Is there anything I didn't ask you that you wanted to talk about?**

It's very disturbing. I've seen good people in the Pentagon, good people in the military, all the way to the top, just throw their hands up in frustration: "No way we can turn this ship around and get it in the right direction." And that's unfortunate. You just gotta come in and scrap the whole process.

**In a bureaucracy, you have to often make decisions about whether you're going to make incremental changes or radical changes. But most important changes can't be made on an incremental basis. It would take a strong president to do that.**

And a strong Secretary of Defense. And leadership on the Hill that will support it. As well as so-called "industry titans." And getting all of that to come together at one time—that's the problem.

What needs to be done can't be done bit by bit. It's got to be revolutionary. ■

**GEORGE KENNEY** is a former career U.S. foreign service officer. He produces and hosts the *Electric Politics* podcast ([www.electricpolitics.com](http://www.electricpolitics.com)), from which this interview was adapted.



Members of the Mehdi Army stand guard next to a poster of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, at a checkpoint in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq.

JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

BY ROBERT S. ESHELMAN

## Muqtada, the Future of Iraq

"Firebrand." It was the ubiquitous moniker used to describe Iraq's fiercely anti-American Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr when, in March 2004, his leering portrait became commonplace among American media reports of Iraq.

American Viceroy L. Paul Bremer III had just shut down al-Sadr's Baghdad newspaper, *al-Hawza*, and hinted at arresting him, ushering in the first of several confrontations with al-Sadr and his Mehdi Army.

More recently, this label has given way to that of "Iranian-backed"—conjuring comparisons to Lebanon's Hezbollah and Palestine's besieged Hamas party.

In both cases, these depictions serve to portray al-Sadr as an irrational, extremist proxy, who, to a great degree, has contributed to Iraq's instability and continues to be a major obstacle to peace in Iraq, if not across the Middle East.

But as Patrick Cockburn, the Iraq correspondent

for *The Independent* of London, argues convincingly in *Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival and the Struggle for Iraq* (Scribner, May 2008), such representations overlook the causes of al-Sadr's rise to political prominence. More importantly, they grossly misrepresent his unique blend of Shiite religious doctrine and Iraqi nationalism, as well as overlook the fact that he leads the only truly mass political movement in Iraq.

"Part of the mystery concerning Muqtada has its origin in simple ignorance," writes Cockburn. Muqtada's emergence as a central figure in Iraq, he continues, is surprising only if one is unfamiliar with "the bloody and dramatic story of resistance to Saddam Hussein by Iraqi Shia as a whole and the al-

Sadr family in particular.”

Over the first several chapters of *Muqtada*, Cockburn traces this largely untold, and, indeed, bloody chronicle.

At the heart of Muqtada’s backstory are his father-in-law—Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr—and his father—Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr. Both attained the honorific of Grand Ayatollah and were killed by Saddam’s regime. Baqir was executed in 1980 and Sadiq was assassinated in 1999, along with two of Muqtada’s brothers.

These two figures—who remain highly revered by Iraqi Shiite today—bequeathed Muqtada a bounty of religious and political legitimacy upon becoming the leader of the Sadrist movement.

Bound up with the Sadr family biography is an intricate history of modern Iraq: intra-Shiite rivalries; the brutal Iran-Iraq war in the ’80s; the collapse of secular, Iraqi nationalism under Saddam; and the failed Shiite uprising of 1991.

Cockburn, who has been reporting from Iraq since 1977, nimbly weaves together these developments, which are essential to understanding contemporary Iraqi politics, without ever straying far from his central object of inquiry—Muqtada’s ascension to political significance.

American dailies churn out stories of a centralized, albeit struggling, political system—where power emanates from the American Embassy, the military and, nominally, from Iraqi governmental institutions. But Cockburn’s articles convey a more complicated, troubling view of the dysfunctional occupation, and expose the deep wounds of Iraq’s sectarian bloodletting. (His previous book on Iraq, *The Occupation*, was short-listed for a National Book Critics Circle award in 2007.)

Following the U.S. invasion, Muqtada’s keen political and military sensibilities allowed him to step into a central position on the political landscape. During the spring and summer of 2004, he and his Mehdi Army faced down American forces in Najaf and the Sadr City neighborhood of Baghdad, tak-

ing heavy losses. Since then, his army has developed from rag-tag groups of irregulars into a more coherent and capable, although not yet highly organized, fighting force.

During that time, Muqtada skillfully played his hand vis-à-vis the United

both of which are often overblown but in need of inquiry.

“Muqtada al-Sadr is the most important and surprising figure to emerge in Iraq since the U.S. invasion,” writes Cockburn. “He is the Messianic leader of the religious and political movement of the

### **‘Had Muqtada been part of the political process from the beginning,’ Cockburn writes, ‘the chances of creating a peaceful, prosperous Iraq would have been greater.’**

States and the interim Iraqi government. He sometimes took forceful stands while at other times made tactical retreats. At the dawn of Iraq’s 2005 elections, he entered the electoral realm, when large political gains were almost certain.

Muqtada does not appear as a principal character in Cockburn’s book until the ninth chapter, roughly halfway through, and is rarely quoted directly, not to mention interviewed at length. This may seem odd at first but is, in fact, what makes this book so strikingly relevant.

Like his backstory of the Iraqi Shiite and the Sadr family, Cockburn shows that Muqtada’s rise has as much, perhaps more, to do with the setting—American military and political blunders, sectarian conflict, and intra-Shiite politics—than it does with any of Muqtada’s particular attributes, however crucial those might be.

In a similar vein, Cockburn steers clear of exoticizing Iraq’s Shiites, though he does not hesitate to acknowledge the role that faith plays in mobilizing them into action. He recalls how, after the fall of Saddam, millions of Shiites embarked on a mass pilgrimage to Kerbala for the first time in decades. A few months later, these millions again heeded the call of their religious hierarchy and took to the streets of Baghdad, demanding free elections.

Cockburn also takes up Sadr’s difficult-to-pin-down links to sectarian violence and his supposed ties to Iran,

impoverished Shia underclass whose lives were ruined by a quarter century of war, repression and sanctions.”

Having toppled Saddam from power in spring 2003, the United States was taken completely by surprise by Muqtada’s power and influence.

“Had [Muqtada] been part of the political process from the beginning,” Cockburn writes, “the chances of creating a peaceful, prosperous Iraq would have been greater.”

Cockburn reveals by twists and turns Muqtada’s emergence on the political scene and his deftness in building his political movement.

Based on decades of reportage and peppered with interviews with Mehdi fighters, Sadrist insiders and others close to, or knowledgeable of, Muqtada and the Sadrist movement, Cockburn delivers an important book on the post-invasion period.

With provincial elections in Iraq slated to occur later this year and Iraqi President Nouri al-Maliki’s government clamping down on Sadrist forces in Baghdad and in the Shiite south, Cockburn’s *Muqtada* serves as a necessary guidebook for interpreting the turbulent course that Iraqi politics has taken over the past several years—and where it is likely to go next. ■

**ROBERT S. ESHELMAN’S** articles have appeared in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *In These Times* and *The Nation*.



## BOOKS

# Food Fights

By Jeremy Gantz

**G**LOBALLY, 1 BILLION overweight people coexist with 800 million starving people.

That's one of many perverse facts in *Stuffed & Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* (Melville House, April 2008, U.S. release), author Raj Patel's searing indictment of the forces that shape what and how we eat.

Patel is an ideal candidate to explain this tragic paradox: He has worked for the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations. But as the book's back cover notes, he's also been "tear-gassed on four continents protesting them."

Patel writes that he is appalled by global food inequality, but he tempers his anger with the informed and sharp analysis of a policy-wonk (he's now a visiting scholar at the University of California-Berkeley).

Patel is more precocious tour guide than dispassionate academic. He details the causes of agricultural crises around the world, from the suicides of indebted Indian farmers to the tens of thousands of slaves supporting Brazil's rapidly growing soy industry.

And that is *Stuffed & Starved's* chief strength and weakness: Throughout 300-plus pages, Patel's wide-angle lens and agile intellect chronicle so many people, on so many continents, that the book ultimately is more a lucid list of injustices than a cogent argument.

And yet it should serve as an invaluable primer for anyone new to the politics of food. With a problem as complex and as hidden from affluent consumers' appetites as our food system, descriptions of how that system undermines farmers' livelihoods are in order.

Patel writes about how Britain's colonial-era food system—built through Caribbean plantations and settler colonies—is a prelude to post-World War II U.S. food aid and development policies. He cuts a devastating path through the origins of the global food system and



Haitians line up as volunteers prepare food at Saint Clare's church rectory in Port au Prince on April 30. The church serves about 1,000 people a day.

its increasingly transnational corporate management: from British imperialist Cecil Rhodes (who said, "The Empire ... is a bread and butter question") to Americans, such as Earl Butz, Nixon's agricultural secretary ("Food is a tool. It is a weapon in the U.S. negotiating kit").

On the issue of the WTO's food trade policies, Patel alleges agricultural imperialism:

Rather than using food aid to demonstrate its largesse, the U.S. developed sophisticated new trading arrangements, while continuing to support its farming industry, and regulating the international domain through debt. ... [The WTO's] new constitution for global economic development wasn't designed to deliver wholesale improvements in the quality of life of the poorest. It sits, rather, as the latest episode in the long history of the generation of supplies of cheap food to prevent insurrection.

To Patel, industrialized countries never give food freely to needy countries in the "Global South." In other words, there is no free lunch.

*Stuffed & Starved* at times treads ground that may be well known to many progressives. It reviews how the United Fruit Company (a.k.a. Chiquita) spawned "Banana Republics" in Latin America, how modern famines don't occur for lack of food, and how billion-dollar American and European agricultural subsidies ruin Third World farmers.

But the book's brilliance lies in its micro-histories of things you thought you knew—such as supermarkets, which Pa-

tel labels "the high temple of the modern food system," and TV dinners, which he traces to a 240-ton trainload of frozen turkeys looking for a home in 1953.

Unfortunately, after unveiling obscure facts of the modern food world, Patel offers only familiar prescriptions for change—avoid processed foods, eat locally and seasonally, and support local businesses and farm workers' unions.

Still, he challenges many consumers' comfortable assumptions, like the ability of mass-produced organic and "fair trade" foods to fundamentally change our system of food production. Supermarkets, Patel writes, are "where we learn to forget how things are produced and learn the guilty and addictive pleasures of purchase. They can, at best, only offer social change as a bauble, dangled in front of the consumer, far from the engines of profit and exploitation."

He says real change can arise from an ambitious list of government policies: ending subsidies to agribusiness, taxing processed food to reflect its negative health and environmental effects, canceling debt and paying reparations to developing countries, and ensuring living wages for all, so all can afford to eat well.

A tall order to be sure, and one that governments will likely never fulfill voluntarily. Which is why one of *Stuffed & Starved's* last insights may be more important than Patel's calls for change: "[A]lthough it is controlled by some of the

most powerful people on the planet, the food system itself is inherently weak.”

As the perfect storm of high fuel prices, bad weather, biofuels and speculation continues to roil markets, drive up food prices and push millions of hungry people into the streets, this paradox becomes more apt. In this moment of awful weakness, “food sovereignty”—the notion that people and countries have the right to define their agricultural policies and protect their food supplies—just might have a fighting chance.

As its subtitle promises, *Stuffed & Starved* reveals movements that are trying to change what and how we eat. But the “battle for the world food system” is hardly singular.

Until this year’s scattered food riots become one movement for change lasting beyond the next round of U.N. World Food Program shipments, the world is likely to become more stuffed and more starved. ■

## BOOKS

### Ivory Tower Inc.

By Jon Whiten

**F**OR THOSE OF US who have flirted with a life in academia, Marc Bousquet’s *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (NYU Press, January 2008) may help explain why so many of us dumped the love affair before it ever began.

In his trenchant critique, Bousquet, an associate professor of English at Santa Clara University and a major figure in the academic labor movement, sheds light on the deteriorating conditions of ivory-tower life and the American university system.

The statistics he collects are alarming. For example, between 1975 and 1995, while undergraduate admissions expanded greatly, the ranks of full-time faculty dwindled by 10 percent. During the same period, nearly 40 percent more graduate-

student employees hit the scene. As a result, three out of four college teachers today lack the security of tenure. One generation ago, this ratio was reversed, Bousquet notes.

In competitive fields, as few as one in three Ph.D. holders can expect to *eventually* find tenure-track employment, writes Bousquet. And when they do, it’s often after longer and longer periods of low-wage, non-tenurable work.

In other words, more and more doctorate holders teach one class at a time wherever they can, for meager pay and no benefits.

Many of these professional adjuncts are scattered among several campuses and institutions, allocating as much time traveling to and from classes as actually teaching. Many lack so much as a phone or a desk, not to mention the time to pursue research and writing.

Despite the across-the-board reduction in university spending on the professoriate, tuition around the nation rose

## [ art space ]



### Beauty is Truth, Truth is Ugly

“Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape” is what curator Denise Markonish calls “the next chapter in the landscape tradition.”

The exhibit includes the work of more than 19 artists whose perspectives are bleak: green pastures piled with garbage, devastation by natural disasters, aerial photographs of pollution.

It includes everything from paintings and films to panoramic prints and “custom biospheres”—Plexiglas domes containing miniature ecosystems in which visitors can peer inside.

“Badlands” is on view at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) until next spring. The museum is also sponsoring a partner event with the Berkshire Botanical Garden called “Cultivate.”

For information, visit [www.massmoca.org](http://www.massmoca.org) and [www.berkshirebotanical.org](http://www.berkshirebotanical.org).

—Matt Schwartzman-Stubbs



by a whopping 38 percent between 2000 and 2005. Where is the money going if not toward these education providers?

Most notably, Bousquet writes, it has gone to administrators, whose ranks have swelled as the profit motive has taken hold; to new sports and cultural facilities; and to high-profile sports coaches, who, Bousquet notes, “are often the highest-paid public employees in their states.”

In New Jersey, the highest-paid public employee is Rutgers head football coach Greg Schiano, who grossed nearly \$1.8 million in 2007, including an \$800,000 interest-free home loan that the university agreed to pay for, according to a February 2008 article in the local *Courier-Post* newspaper. Schiano amassed this exorbitant salary while other sports programs—not to mention courses and academic resources—continue to be slashed.

Rather than merely presenting such troubling statistics, Bousquet gives readers a Marxist analysis of the university’s move toward market fundamentalism. This has created the “managed university,” Bousquet writes, where socially beneficial activities have been converted to commodity form. The managed university is less interested in the “cultivation of a knowledge commons” than in the transaction, or the “sale of information goods” to prospective students.

As knowledge itself has become less important, so too has the idea of hiring the people most qualified to impart—and inspire—knowledge, Bousquet argues. Today, the university simply hires the cheapest available academic labor. That most often takes the form of graduate students, who are among the only people who can afford to teach at such low rates because they need the larger reward: a Ph.D.

Ironically enough, because of this very system, a doctorate degree becomes close to worthless, and its holders become what Bousquet calls “the waste product of graduate education.”

In an interesting wrinkle, Bousquet traces the ways in which existing faculty and their unions have contributed to this system—whether by acquiescing to the commodification of research and intellectual property, or by continuing to label graduate-student employees as

## excerpt



### GIVE A SHIT FOR THE REVOLUTION

*In Toolbox for Sustainable City Living: A Do-It-Yourself Guide (South End Press, June 2008), Scott Kellogg and Stacy Pettigrew describe how to create locally based, ecologically sustainable cities. One idea they have is to create a mobile composting toilet for various rallies and protests—and avoid run-ins with the law.*

Aside from tear gas, rubber bullets and concussion grenades, a major discomfort suffered by global justice protesters during mass demonstrations is the lack of sanitary facilities. Propaganda about violent protesters leads many stores and restaurants in the vicinity of protests to close up, and few protesters ever bother to rent a port-a-potty.

To find a place to poo while struggling to breathe through a gas mask is too much. Something must be done. Something was—a mobile composting toilet. The toilet was constructed in preparation for the 2003 anti-FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) protest in Miami. ...

It could be biked to the scene of a street protest and be fast enough to ride away from an advancing police line. The mobile toilet was ferried via pickup truck to Miami, where it came in quite useful, serving as one of the main latrines at the protest convergence center. A cardboard sign was made for the toilet, painted bright yellow with the words “give a shit for the revolution” written across it in bold lettering. (The collected human manure was donated to a local gardener at the end of the action.) The mobile toilet brought a grounded, earth-focused element into the movement, highlighting the connections between global justice and local sustainability.

Near the end of the protest, Juniper, a compost toilet co-conspirator, and Scott were riding the toilet back from the “really free market,” where it had again served its duty. All of a sudden, a bright red pickup truck pulled across the road in front of them. Several undercover cops jumped out at

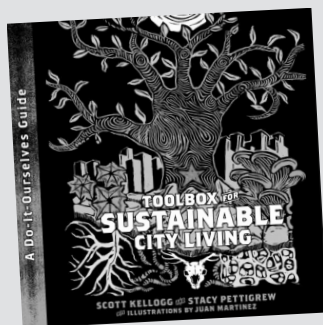
once with their guns drawn. Surely the police imagined that this container of crap was going to be catapulted at them on the front lines of the protest.

“What’s in that barrel?”

“It’s filled with shit,” Juniper calmly replied.

“Oh, that’s all it is? We were sure it was full of bombs and explosives.” ...

Scott and Juniper biked away from the scene, the shit and their freedom intact.



“students” and not “workers.” He rightly notes that many faculty members, faced with administrative threats to their own autonomy and livelihoods, are content to get what they can in the broken system rather than fight to fix it. Thus, collective bargaining by full-time faculty becomes what Portland State University professor Johanna Brenner calls a “survivor project”—and what Bousquet says “fall[s] far short of the ideal of worker solidarity against exploitation.”

With the failure of faculty to affect sys-

temic change, Bousquet sees graduate student employees and other contingent faculty as the last great hope. “They know they are not merely treated like waste, but, in fact, are the actual shit of the system,” he writes, “not merely ‘disposable’ labor but labor that must be disposed of for the system to work.”

The movement to organize graduate-student employees has been around since the ’70s but has intensified in the last decade with high-profile battles at a few elite private universities like New York



University (NYU) and Yale.

NYU grad students, in particular, have had a roller-coaster ride, as detailed in *The University Against Itself: The NYU Strike and the Future of the Academic Workplace* (Temple University Press, February 2008), a collection edited by Monika Krause, Mary Nolan, Michael Palm and Andrew Ross.

Their book combines on-the-ground reportage and thoughtful analysis to provide essential reading on the worker struggles at NYU and the broader academic labor environment.

In April 2000, Daniel Silverman, National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) regional director, found that NYU's teaching assistants were in fact employees, and that the services they provided for NYU were not "simply part of their education."

Within six months, the full NLRB upheld the earlier decision after hearing an appeal from NYU. The United Auto Workers (UAW), acting as the bargaining agent for the Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC), later negotiated what Bousquet calls "one of the best graduate-employee contracts ever."

But between the time that the NLRB ruled in favor of the graduate students, and the time NYU and the UAW ratified the new contract, the first steps toward a rollback had begun.

George W. Bush became president and his anti-labor ideology would soon come to bear on graduate-student employees. In January 2002, Bush made two recess appointments to the NLRB, giving it a Republican majority. Then in 2004, in considering the rights of the UAW to represent student employees at Brown University, the NLRB ruled that the relationship between graduate-student employees and an institution "is primarily educational." In the decision, the board also said, bluntly: "NYU was wrongly decided and should be overruled."

In June 2005, NYU announced it had no intention of negotiating a second contract with the GSOC. That November, the student employees and their allies began a strike.

*The University Against Itself* is strongest when it provides a behind-the-scenes look at what went down during the strike. In

that sense, the book reads like a rebuttal to the flawed and often pro-administration mainstream news reporting on the action.

Susan Valentine's piece, for instance, describes the way the university struck back. The GSOC spokesperson during the strike notes that little more than a month after walking off the job, NYU's president told striking workers that they would be fired for the next semester if they didn't return to work within the next week. He also threatened to remove them from their jobs the following semester if they extended the strike another semester.

"The threat of losing our livelihoods for up to one year had an immediate chilling effect, just as intended," Valentine writes. In most other labor environments, this kind of behavior by an employer would have been illegal—but because the NLRB had ruled that grad-student employees were primarily "students," NYU could act ruthlessly and with impunity.

Valentine also takes a look at the less apparent way the administration retaliated: through disinformation. "Facts were distorted ... to make grads' own fight for

self-determination into meddling by 'autoworkers,'" with NYU constantly griping about the UAW's "interference in academic affairs," she writes.

The university, with its institutional power, was also able to redefine language to control the strike. Thus, graduate-student employees' wages, which are often earned for doing research or teaching undergraduates, became "financial-aid packages" rather than "wages" or even a "salary"—making graduate employees appear more like students and less like workers.

The student employees ended the strike in May 2006—without a contract. Even so, the book's editors conclude that the action wasn't an outright failure because it prompted "widespread reflection on the changing character of the 21st-century university."

Reading Bousquet, one senses he would agree with that characterization. In that regard, the NYU strike should be seen as the necessary first step toward separating the university from our pervasive corporate culture. ■

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



BY TERRY J. ALLEN

## McCain's Aches and Pains



**L**IKE JOKES ABOUT President Bush being stupid, cheap shots at Sen. John McCain's age are largely unfunny. More importantly, they deflect crucial concerns about the men.

Bush's alleged stupidity camouflaged his administration's brilliance in implementing radical economic, ideological, legal and social policies that advanced its agenda. Ridicule of McCain's age (along with paeans to his war record) distracts from hard critiques of his record and policies. McCain's age is irrelevant unless it affects his ability to function in a world that has radically changed since his formative years. McCain's computer illiteracy, for example, is not the result of advanced years. Rather it suggests someone who is coddled, out-of-touch and loath to learn new things.

Nor is McCain's history of cancer tied to age. But some things are, such as the less-publicized array of his potentially compromising conditions, ailments and medications.

Everyone knows about the cancer. In the last 15 years, McCain has had "every kind of skin cancer you can get, basal cell cancer, squamous cell cancer and, of course, malignant melanoma ... [and] quite a few precancerous lesions," said Dr. Nancy Snyderman, who reviewed McCain's medical records. "He's going to get another skin cancer," the NBC News chief medical editor predicted.

The melanoma on his temple, discovered in 2000, is the most worrying. His current doctors described a single site. But buried in the medical

reports released on May 23, was previously undisclosed information. Two pathologists at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology who examined the melanoma specimen in 2000 noted both a primary and satellite cancer, meaning the original site had metastasized and a recurrence was more likely than with a single site.

It is amazing that reporters unearthed this fact. In a parody of openness, McCain allowed a few hand-picked news outlets three hours—an average nine seconds a page—to review 1,173 pages of medical records covering eight years. The campaign cloistered about 20 reporters in a room and barred cell phones, Internet access and leaving the room except for bathroom breaks. The *New York Times*, which had pushed hard for disclosure, was not invited. A follow-up conference call, scheduled for 90 minutes, was stopped after 45.

That the supine media agreed to these conditions rather than boycott the "release" is a travesty. That McCain—who has pledged to "set a new standard for transparency and accountability"—drew little criticism is a triumph of manipulation.

In fact, McCain had pulled the same one-time-only, beat-the-clock trick in 1999 when he released a 1,500-page batch of medical records that included mental health assessments relevant to his imprisonment in Vietnam. They remain sealed.

The recent document dump revealed an aging man on numerous drugs for a panoply of age-appropriate ailments: Hydrochlorothiazide for kidneys, Simvastatin for high cholesterol, occasional Ambien CR for sleeplessness, aspirin to prevent blood clots, and Zyrtec and Claritin

for allergies. The amiloride he takes to preserve potassium in the blood also lowers blood pressure, which is still higher than normal (134 over 84). Possible side effects include kidney damage, impotence, fast or uneven heartbeat, acting awake (driving, eating, talking) while in drug-induced sleep, confusion, and dizziness.

Occasional dizziness is one of the ailments McCain has suffered, along with degenerative arthritis; signs of diverticulitis, an inflammation of the colon; kidney and bladder stones; and benign cysts in both kidneys. Before quitting, he smoked two packs of cigarettes a day for 25 years. He was not tested for memory function.

McCain has undergone at least a half dozen surgeries for skin cancer, a prostate procedure called "transurethral resection," removal of kidney and bladder stones and of potentially cancerous colon polyps. He's had a lens implanted in one eye and mild-moderate high-frequency hearing loss. On the up side, the doctors remarked on "unremarkable" buttocks.

But McCain can still spin with the best. His campaign manager, Rick Davis, boasted that the medical records would show that "he defies all the rules of aging." The campaign also trots out McCain's nonagenarian mother as evidence of good genes, omitting that his father died of a heart attack at 70. A grandfather died at 61.

McCain's age is an issue, but not *the* issue. While his medical records raise questions, his political record of reactionary policies, poor judgment and a dated worldview are more unhealthy—for the nation and the world. ■

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# Vietnam

Continued from back page

their own villages.

We're here to make sure the voices—and, courtesy of Tam, the faces—of these people are not lost to history. We're here to document the hidden, if not forbidden, history of the "Vietnam War," untold in most mainstream U.S. histories. We're here to record grim testimony of near-constant artillery shelling, of homes turned to ash by napalm, of orchards and gardens decimated by chemical defoliants, of farming families forced to live in their fields because of constant aerial bombardment, of wives and husbands, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers maimed and killed by fragmentation grenades, rifle fire and helicopter gunships. And we're here to track down massacres.

## A scene of horror

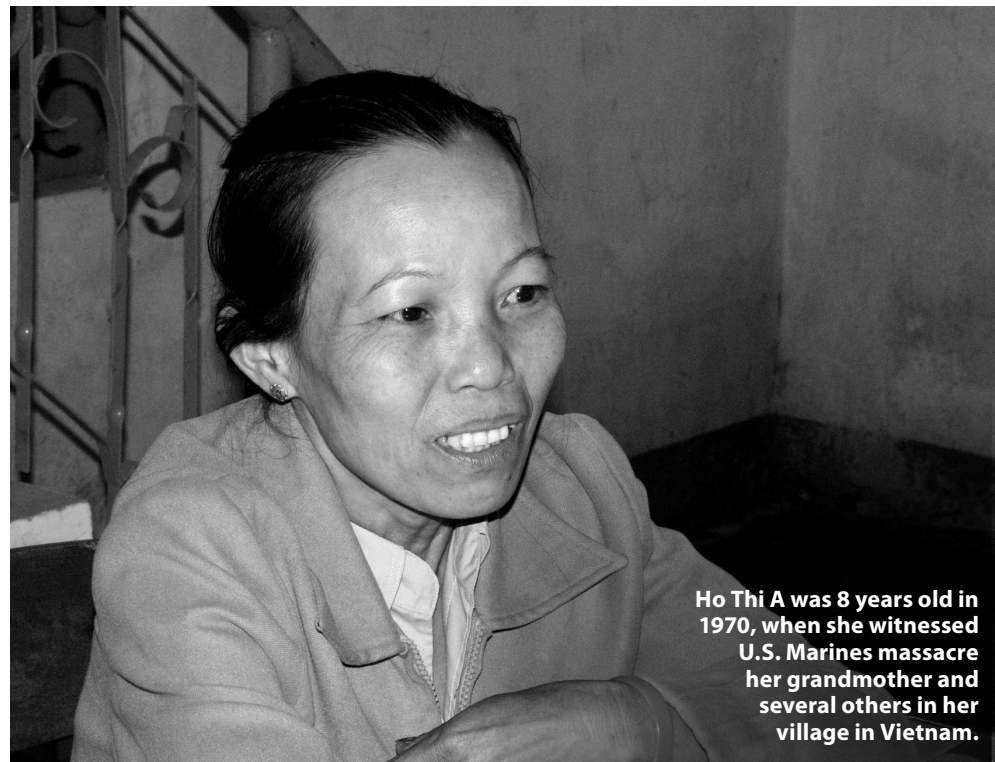
We visited massacre sites from Quang Tri—the northern-most province in what was once the Republic of Vietnam ("South Vietnam")—to the deep south of the Mekong Delta. But we spent the bulk of our time in the central part of the country—provinces that had the highest concentration of U.S. troops, such as Quang Ngai, the site of the infamous My Lai massacre.

In another of the central provinces, Quang Nam, we headed to Le Bac hamlet. I had long suspected something very dark happened there.

During the war, the Liberation Press Agency—the communications wing of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG)—reported that U.S. Marines "shot 38 persons[,] mostly women and children[,] in Le Bac hamlet, Quang Nam Province on April 15, 1970." Only weeks before those alleged killings, Marines had carried out a massacre in a neighboring district.

In his book, *Son Thang: An American War Crime*, Gary Solis, a war crimes scholar and veteran of the war, laid bare the details of that massacre—of 16 unarmed women and children at Son Thang—by a Marine Corps "killer team."

Only after a group of Vietnamese complained about the deaths to Marines



Ho Thi A was 8 years old in 1970, when she witnessed U.S. Marines massacre her grandmother and several others in her village in Vietnam.

based near the hamlet did the Corps launch an investigation into the killing of civilians in Le Bac. The Marines eventually claimed, according to press reports at the time, that an unspecified number of civilians had indeed been killed, but that it could not be ascertained if they were killed by the Marines.

An official Marine Corps history, produced later, states that "Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines engaged enemy troops near Le Bac (2) ... The company called in jets and Cobra gunships; a dozen enemy troops died in the action, but so did about 30 people in the nearby hamlet."

In 1971, during the Paris Peace talks, the PRG gave U.S. Rep. Robert L. Leggett (D-Calif.) an awkwardly translated copy of the Vietnamese document that provided information for the Liberation Press Agency broadcast. He, in turn, sent a copy to the Pentagon, which I found in the Army's files. The typo-ridden source mentioned a survivor—a young girl named Hoang Thi Ai. Locals informed us that Hoang was not a hamlet surname, but pointed us to a woman named Ho Thi A who lived in Le Bac as a child.

She said she remembered Marines entering the hamlet on March 10, 1970, on

the lunar calendar—the equivalent of the solar date of April 15, 1970. She recalled civilian deaths, too—but not the way the Marines claim they occurred. Just 8 years old at the time, Ho Thi A said she was playing in her home that morning when the aerial assault began. People ran for their bomb shelters and waited out the attack. When the bombardment ended, U.S. troops entered the hamlet on foot and people scrambled from their bunkers, fearing the Americans would throw grenades inside.

"There were three of us standing at the entrance to the bunker: me and two old women—my neighbor and my grandmother," Ho Thi A said. One of the American troops was standing only 15 feet away when he fired. "Miss Chay was shot dead," she said. "Then he shot my grandmother. She died too. At that moment I was so scared and ran into the bunker and hid."

The U.S. troops threw grenades into her bunker, but because of its shape, she was shielded from the blast. Later, after the Americans left the area, she emerged just as local guerrillas, who had been hiding nearby, also appeared. She followed them to the front part of the hamlet. What they found was a scene of horror.

Lying at the entrance of a bunker were nine bodies—two families—who had been shot. All were women and children. All were civilians. In total, Ho Thi A said, Marines killed 15 people that day.

### **Only women and children**

Ho Nam was a local guerrilla living in Le Bac and recalls March 10, 1970 (lunar) well. When I asked if he fought the Americans that day, he was incredulous. Most of the time he didn't even carry a weapon, and American firepower was overwhelming.

But U.S. helicopters must have suspected armed enemy forces were around, he said, because they circled the hamlet and fired on it. Then came the jets and their "petrol bombs." He took cover in a bunker during the air strike, as did other local people. After the bombardment ended, he said he ran and hid in a nearby field of tall grass, but women and children stayed behind as U.S. troops entered the hamlet. He returned later that day: "The first bunker where they entered the hamlet, they shot two people. Ho Thi A was in this bunker," Ho Nam said. "She saw the old women were killed, so she hid in the bunker."

"Then I came to the second bunker behind the house, there were two families who took shelter there—nine people. They were all shot dead," he recalled. "Only children and women—the women were all only about 15 years old."

At another bunker, his own mother was shot dead. He buried her and helped bury the others, as well. In all, 15 people were killed, he recalled.

Ho Nam still lives in Le Bac and led us a short way from his home to a nearby backyard. He showed us two burial mounds: one circular, the other a long, thin oblong mound—the graves of nine massacre victims, he said.

The Marines claim they were involved in a firefight with enemy troops that day. But all the Vietnamese we talked to said the "Liberation forces" were not in the hamlet. Only locals who couldn't run easily—women with small children and the elderly—were there when the Marines arrived. While the Liberation Press Agency reported nearly 40 civilian dead, and the Americans admitted to 30, the

Vietnamese recall 15. War crimes are a murky business.

Whatever the details, what is clear is that almost 40 years has not diminished the horror of the day for Ho Thi A.

capable of speaking her language and—because of professional and cultural reasons—are unable to do so much as reach out and hold her hand.

### **Footnotes in Vietnam's**

## **No one will ever know how many U.S.-perpetrated massacres took place in Vietnam. Nor how many hamlets were decimated by bombings. Nor the number of villages laid waste by artillery strikes.**

### **hidden history**

I've spent years studying U.S. military conduct in Vietnam—reading formerly classified U.S. war crimes documents; interviewing retired Pentagon officials who tracked atrocities; speaking with veterans courageous enough to admit the crimes they saw or even committed; as well as scouring Vietnamese sources, U.S. histories and press reports.

I've worked to demonstrate that it's simply incorrect to begin and end the discussion of U.S. atrocities with My Lai, as most U.S. histories of the war tend to do. I've tried to demonstrate how pervasive the civilian suffering was—but this trip again drove home to me that the scale of the carnage is still almost beyond my grasp.

No one will ever know how many U.S.-perpetrated massacres took place in Vietnam. Nor how many hamlets were decimated by bombings. Nor the number of villages laid to waste by artillery strikes. Nor will there ever be an accurate count of the people psychologically injured, maimed or killed. Le Bac is just one horrific footnote in a hidden history of the Vietnam War that few Americans can truly comprehend—if they even wish to do so.

What Americans can do is remember that somewhere, right now, in Vietnam—as in current war zones, like Iraq and Afghanistan—Ho Thi A and other survivors are living with trauma that doesn't fade with the passage of decades. In Vietnam, the scars Sartre spoke of are still visible—if you're willing to look closely enough. ■

The philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote, "Our victims know us by their scars and by their chains, and it is this that makes their evidence irrefutable."

We might also add "tears" to his list.

### **Picking at emotional scabs**

I have interviewed many Vietnamese people about their most traumatic, horrific experiences. Grandmothers have told me about the sex crimes they endured, parents have told me of murdered children and old women have spoken of perverse tortures they were subjected to. I've seen burn scars, empty eye sockets, mangled limbs and the grotesque injuries that result from high-velocity rifle rounds and fragmentation weapons designed to maim and kill.

I know the discomfort of reducing people to tears and picking at emotional scabs that took years to form. But I've rarely experienced anything like I did when interviewing Ho Thi A.

The irony is that, as far as massacre interviews go, I thought this one had been proceeding along fine. There weren't even any tears—up to a point. Then the floodgates broke. This wasn't tearing up. Or crying. Or even sobbing. She began inconsolably bawling.

At the five-minute mark, it was past uncomfortable.

At 10 minutes, I wondered if she would ever stop.

At 15 minutes, I was at a loss of what to do.

If you've never reduced a stranger to such a state, it's hard to explain what it's like to sit across from a woman you've only just met and have just plunged into an acute emotional crisis, while being in-



# WAR CRIMES HUNTER

## ON THE TRAIL OF ATROCITY IN VIETNAM



BY NICK TURSE, PHOTOS BY TAM TURSE

**A**S I WATCH BEADS of water trickle through cracks in the hull of the 20-year-old, rough-hewn *sampan* chugging down the Huong Diem River, I begin to think about how I came to be a war crimes hunter. Here, deep in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, accompanied by my wife, photojournalist Tam Turse, and our translator, I'm on a mission to seek out and record the stories of the forgotten victims of what is appropriately known here as the "American War."

I've been researching U.S. war crimes in Vietnam since 2002, when I first located a collection of U.S. war crimes investigations documents—compiled by a secret U.S. Army task force in the 1970s—at the U.S. National Archives. After writing my doctoral dissertation from those files, I traveled to Vietnam in 2006 as a

freelance reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* to track down witnesses and survivors of a few cases. That trip spanned only a couple weeks.

But this trip in early 2008—field research for my forthcoming book *Kill Anything That Moves*—lasts a couple months.

Traveling by airplane, car, motorbike, ferry boat, barge, fishing boat, motorized *sampan* and often on foot, we trek far off the beaten track—past verdant green rice paddies that stretch out as far as the eye can see; into fields that double as mass graves; down roads that collapse into thin dirt footpaths or the one, on a tiny island off the coast of central Vietnam, which suddenly vanished into sandy beach, stranding the car until we pushed it free.

Along the way, we sought out people who haven't seen a Westerner since the war and those whose stories are unknown beyond

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46